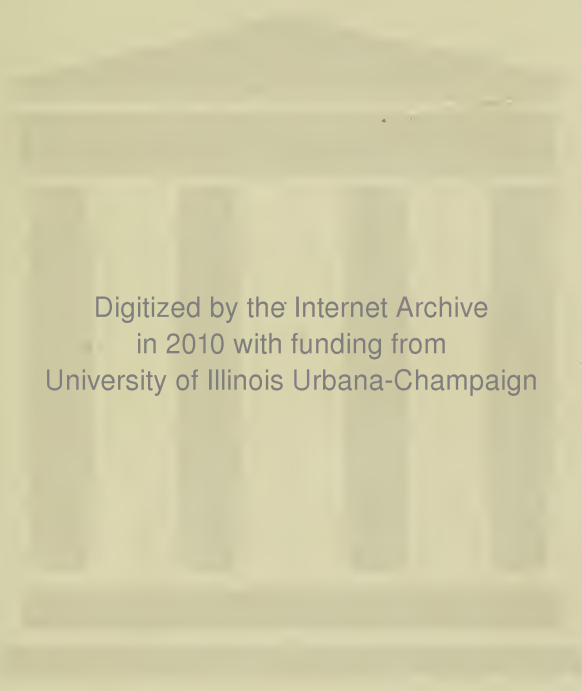


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GUY WATERMAN.

A Novel.

BY

JOHN SAUNDERS,

AUTHOR OF 'ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET,
STRAND.

1864.

LONDON: PRINTED BY W. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET,
AND CHURCH LANE.

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SEARCHY

1953

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PREFACE.



THERE are only two ways in which an artist, who, receiving nothing from Fortune, gives many hostages to it, can hope to obtain his legitimate ends: the one is, to devote himself to labours apart from his true calling, and wait and hope for the leisure and peace which may never (thus) come; the other, to accept that calling as his only one, even if it involves temporary sacrifices of individual taste and feeling in the struggle for popularity, which to him and his means—bread.

The present writer tried the first method, and it cost him many years to produce a single work ('Love's Martyrdom'), by which he would consent to be judged; and then he learned the mistake he had made, in supposing that, in the higher branches of

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literature, a man need only produce fitting credentials to be able thenceforward to devote himself to his own work in his own way.

He accepted from that time the only alternative. The first method having failed, he adopted the second:—‘The Shadow in the House,’ ‘Martin Pole’ (a collection of fugitive tales written at different times), and ‘Abel Drake’s Wife,’ are in one direction—and ‘Guy Waterman,’ in another—the results. The first three books are studies, leading, it is hoped, ultimately to some finished work or works; the fourth was produced with no higher literary aim than that of helping to amuse the novel-reading public.

‘Guy Waterman’ (founded on a sketch which will be remembered by the readers of ‘Martin Pole’) was written for the ‘Penny Illustrated Paper.’ The author had to accept the known facts of the public taste, and make

the best of them. If he had not thought he could do this innocently, he has a right to say he would not have done it at all. But the tale was written—was successful (so the writer is assured by those who have the strongest motives for estimating accurately its reception)—is to be republished in another periodical—and is now proposed (for the second or third time) to be issued in the ordinary library form. As the latest proposition comes from the author's publishers, he cannot but consent, were it only on the ground of their considerate patience towards him (and upon which he is still obliged to trespass), as regards a long-promised successor to 'Abel Drake's Wife.'

He has only to add that the story has been revised throughout for the present issue, and that large portions of it have been rewritten.

LONDON, *April*, 1864.

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GUY WATERMAN

CHAPTER I.

A MOTHER'S LETTER.

'To Phœbe Waterman..

' Branhape Hall, Sunday Evening.

' DEAR NURSE,—Don't be alarmed when I tell you to read this secretly, and to burn it the moment you have read ; unless, indeed, you refuse my prayer, which I do not, cannot, believe. I must not see you, not just now, for reasons you will understand. Read this letter, then, I entreat you, very carefully ; so that the directions in it may not be mistaken. Oh, take care of that ! so much will depend upon it. But when you have done so, and consented, as I am sure you will consent, then commit this to the flames ; for I am about to tell you in it things that

you alone must ever know, and of which I should shudder to think any record existed except that which may live in your heart. You have always professed affection for me; you have appeared devoted to me; and I, in return, have treated you more as a friend than as one conscious of, or caring for, our different worldly positions. Well, I am now about to try all your devotedness. I have determined to leave this place to-morrow, perhaps for ever, and I will not go without my child. But I do not ask you simply to give him up to me. No; I want you to go with him, and with me. Do not be afraid. You shall return in a very few months; and your husband shall find you come back enriched beyond his utmost desires. I cannot nurse my boy; that you know. I have again solemnly promised my husband, at the doctor's urgent request, that I will not do so. But I *must* go; I must take him with me; and now, Phœbe, will you not come with us both, and remove from me my last danger and difficulty? I do not ask you to leave your own babe behind, unless you have some friend or relative in whom you can

entirely trust. If you wish to bring him with you, do so; and as you have been a mother to my child from the very hour of its birth, when you were so unexpectedly called to my aid, so will I be a true mother to yours. Born within a fortnight of each other, nourished by the same milk, who can tell but that their fates are intentionally knit together by a Providential hand? But if you take him you must find a companion to nurse one of the children. The girl you now employ would be too young to travel. Choose a discreet person. I will pay her well. There are several young women in the village who will be glad to be so engaged. Be silent at first about the voyage across the seas. Only take care to find a person that *can* go on with us, when you finally explain to her what is wanted. If she then refuses—say at the seaport where we shall meet—we will seek other aid; and she will have been useful in the meantime in helping us to get away from here.

‘ For, O dear Phœbe, I do want to get away! And I am strong enough now. I walked for an hour this morning in the park in order to try what

I could do. There is that in my spirit which will make up for all the deficiencies of the frame. I *can* go now, and I must. It is not only this message from my dying sister that moves me; it is not even the spiritual danger to my boy's soul, who will be educated as a heretic if I stay; but, O Phœbe, it is this—either my husband no longer loves me, or I have ceased to love him. Which it is I know not. You have seen much, and I know you have guessed more. But even you cannot tell what an aching heart I have had since these conversations with him about our child's future. When I married him (and never shall I cease to be grateful for the motives that prompted him to come to me in my loneliness, in my bitter distress and misery) I did not so much weigh his generosity, or the station or shelter he offered me, or even his delicate sympathy with my love for the dead—all these influenced me, of course; but above and beyond them all was the paramount thought that I should be an instrument in God's hand to bring him to the true Church; that I should be able to advance the interests of our faith by the spectacle of so noble and influential

a convert. And, looking in that direction exclusively, I saw beyond this success a vision of domestic peace and affection and unity that fascinated me, and made me forget for a time my sorrow and my depression.

‘ Dear Phœbe, you who shared secretly my hopes must, I know, have participated keenly in all my disappointments. I cannot bear to dwell on them. Enough, I know now he is unchangeable. He is willing enough to respect my faith, but he forbids interference with his. And on one occasion he spoke with such sternness that my very blood froze as I listened for the first time to other than kindly tones from his lips. Well, I know now the worst. The doing away with this delusion of my influence over his spiritual welfare has, I fear, destroyed at the same time another delusion, that we loved each other as man and wife should love. Perhaps I may err in this. Perhaps I am just now estimating things at false values. But what am I to do? My sister cries to me with her dying breath to visit her; my husband refuses practically, though not in words, his consent to my taking the child

with me if I do undertake so distant a voyage ; and the whole future of my dear, dear babe hangs on this my present decision. Can I leave him to be reared as a Protestant ? Impossible ! I must then either violate my duty to my husband or my duty to my child. Which shall it be ? Oh, Phœbe, I have asked myself this question endlessly for days and nights past ; I have knelt to ask it, have prayed while asking it, have felt at times my whole being dissolved in tears as I asked it, and looked around, up, everywhere, in vain, for a clear sufficing answer.

‘ Perhaps even now I could not go, but that I see he is willing to allow me to depart, provided I go alone. Still I do not blame him. He is perhaps as bitterly disappointed as I am at the state of our present relations ; and he is proud and little inclined to speak when wounded. No, I cannot blame him ; I blame only myself ; I ought not to have married. My heart, for all useful purposes, was in the grave. Religion gave it a new life, but he did not respond, as I hoped, to its quickening influence ; and now—Heaven help me !—there is our

child, dear to us both, but making a gulf between us both while we are together. Am I not right, then, to decide to leave him?—I do not say intentionally for ever. I will not undertake to deal with issues that are not in my hand; but let us secure the present. I *can* go, happily, without exciting any noticeable or injurious comment. The servants have been aware for days that the question of my voyage is in agitation; and, if he be hurt or angry that the child is removed without his consent, he will not, I am certain, make any useless or unnecessary exposure. I shall take care that, by the time he learns you have gone away with the boy, he shall know by letter it is to meet me; and that I pray alike to him and to Heaven for forgiveness if I err.

‘I have told you, Phœbe, all this because I know that you already suspect the greater part of the truth; and because I have no right to ask so much confidence from you without giving something in return.

‘Now, then, to business. I shall leave here tomorrow night for Plymouth, with my husband’s

consent. He will not, I am quite sure, ask me anything about the boy ; knowing how dangerous a subject it is, and believing that he remains behind. Do not you move or make any sign until he has been or sent to you after my departure. He will then want to know that the child is safe ; but when that visit is over, be prompt and decisive in all you do. You must, if possible, so manage matters that you shall not be missed by anybody for a day or so longer ; but do not delay after once letting them see that you and the child are safe in the cottage after I shall have gone away. We must risk something. If only we get the child safely on board the ship, I can depend upon the captain. His vessel is in part my sister's property, and for that reason she wished me to sail with him.

‘I enclose twenty pounds, five of it in gold and silver, so that you may not by any unusual display of means excite suspicion while making any necessary outlay in the village.

‘And now, Phœbe, all my prospects of future peace—if any such there be—and all my hopes of securing my child's spiritual welfare, are in your

hands. You, too, are a Catholic; and you have, if I did not mistake you, shown to me, so far as you could venture, that you were prepared to sacrifice something, not only for me personally, but for the true faith. Now, then, I test you. If you absolutely refuse, return me this package entire, just as you receive it, within one hour after you receive it. If you agree, and that means if you have any sincere love for me or for my babe that now hangs at your breast, you need take no notice whatever. Only be sure of your messenger if you do send. What would become of me were I to reach Plymouth and see neither you nor my babe? You will not treat me thus? Think, too, what it would be for you knowingly to let my boy suck poison from you. Yet is it a less matter to allow anyone, even a father, to poison his soul? Oh, no!

‘Ever your friend and mistress,

‘AMY DALRYMPLE.

‘P.S.—*One* hour, recollect! See yourself that your messenger *does* come to the hall, if you send one. But again I say, you will not, cannot do that,

my own faithful Phœbe? No; you will destroy this letter as soon as you have read it, as I at first requested, and ensure for ever the grateful affection of A. D.

‘2nd P.S.—On reading this again, I have remembered that, though I cannot from here see your cottage, there is a room that commands a view of the shed in the fields where your husband sometimes works. With a glass I can see it perfectly. If, then, you will go there and wave a white handkerchief three times, I shall know all is well. I go now to watch for the signal.

‘I forgot to say the enclosure is the address of the shipping agent at Plymouth. And now, Phœbe, once more I say, I wait your signal.’

CHAPTER II.

ON THE DECK OF THE 'BLACK GULL.'

IT was close upon seven by the captain's watch—seven in the evening of the 20th of July, being the sixth day on which the 'Black Gull' had lain becalmed just within sight of the Irish shore.

Six days her sails had been lazily flapping about her masts, vainly wooing the breeze that would not come. Six days her crew had been wondering and speculating hour by hour how much longer they would see the faint strip of coast that represented to them all the broad lands and people of Great Britain. Six days her captain had searched incessantly all points of the compass in the hope of discovering tokens of a coming change. Six days the timbers of the 'Black Gull' had been whitening and gaping in many a seam, under the fierce, blistering, burning sun.

Still she lay as though she were spell-bound ; and the tiny transparent ripples broke against the black sides as calmly as if it were a little island that had never moved since the sea was made, and never would move more till the sea should leave its bed.

But what ails her crew just now ? Is there a dream within the dream that seems to possess the 'Black Gull ?' Every man moves as if he were afraid to break the silence. Here and there are little groups of men that don't seem to talk, and yet look into each other's faces with a mutual understanding and gloomy sympathy. The captain appears to be especially disturbed. He walks apart, glancing almost furtively, and as if half-ashamed, at a book that one might suppose, did not the idea seem so very absurd, to be a Common Prayer-book. In the centre of the vessel, under a kind of awning hung round and projecting from the mainmast, are two females, one of peculiar beauty and delicacy, wearing the garb of a lady of rank ; the other, who is also good-looking, but whose face is clouded and distorted with grief and passion, appears to be her maid, judging from the dress she wears. She has a

child on her knee, which she rocks to and fro; and which occasionally she stoops to kiss and to strain to her bosom under the impulse of some overwhelming trouble. It is evidently not this child who is ill or in danger. He is a fine chubby infant, of that severe kind of beauty which we find in the pictures of Raphael. The lady leans over her with one hand on her shoulder, and occasionally whispers some kind word or soothing phrase, and calls her 'dear Phœbe,' while begging her to restrain the tumults of her grief.

The signal, then, had been answered; the lady of Branhape Hall was here with her trusted nurse and confidante, and *one* child. But what of the other? There is, back there in the afterpart of the vessel, a woman talking with the wife of the purser or steward, but her arms are empty, and she stands, looks and moves as though her occupation were over. Is one of the children dead? Has the ill-omened voyage begun in calamity? It is not Mrs. Dalrymple who has been stricken. All her anxiety is evidently for her companion, except when now and then she starts forward somewhat apprehensively, lest Phœbe,

in her sudden and impulsive gesture, will let fall or crush in her fierce embrace the babe on her knee.

As the captain, in his uneasy wanderings with that mysterious book in his hand, passed a couple of men in the forepart of the vessel, he said,

‘ ’Tis nearly time.’

‘ Ay, ay, sir ; all ready ! ’ was the response, and the two men (who were more impassive than the rest, as though duty admitted of no feeling) began to look over the vessel’s side, and gossip in a low, dreamy undertone, while they watched with half-shut eyes the sea-gulls flashing like specks of silver as they hovered between them and the purple line of coast. Lazily, also, they began to watch the fishing-smacks—sailless—putting off in a cluster like a little black band of conspirators on the still waters in the intense quiet of the evening. North, south, and east, spread a cloudless blue sky above a shadowless sea—a sea so placid that its billows appeared but as lines scratched upon its glassy surface at regular intervals. North, south, and east—sky, air, and ocean lay under the spell of the golden calm ; but in the west, prominent and lurid

like a red eye starting from its socket, hung the sun, and as its edge dipped into the sea it seemed to set the quiet waters on fire, and to spread a flaming pathway right across them up to the ship's black side.

One of the two men had turned to gaze with lack-lustre eye on the wondrous spectacle, and he was even yawning in its face ; but his companion, who had apparently found something to attract his attention, presently remarked,

' I say, Jack, what's that boat after, such a long way out at sea ? Any of us run away ? It seems coming arter us.'

' I don't know,' replied Jack, after another prolonged yawn, ' and I'm sure I don't care. A detective 'ud be a godsend now. I never was so sick of anything in my life as these here blessed six days aboard o' this here blessed Black Gull.'

' I suppose,' continued the first speaker, ' it's only an amoosement party—Lord love 'em !—that wants to pay a visit to the sea, and daren't take not no such liberties except in this uncommon fine weather.'

They were interrupted by the captain, who came up to them, saying,

‘Now, boys, this business must be got over somehow, while the light lasts. Fetch up the mate. Tell him we are quite ready. Tom Tute, you must be the sexton and clerk in one. The Powers above only know how I shall get through the job. The more I try to understand what I am to read, the more I get muddled.’

Tom Tute, an old man with little sparkling black eyes, touched the black corkscrew ringlet hanging over one of them, and made for the cabin; while Jack, going a little towards the centre of the ship, began to clear away coils of rope and other matters that lay about, so as to make a vacant space, extending from where the females remained under the awning to a particular part of the side of the vessel. Mrs. Dalrymple saw the movement, and redoubled her attentions to her companion. Phœbe saw it too, and began to rock to and fro with increased agitation and violence, and with a foot that at times seemed to strike the boards in fierce defiance. All the other occupants of the deck also

saw what Jack was about, and most of them appeared to feel a kind of relief that they knew now they were not chosen for so disagreeable a task, and one that with a superstitious class like sailors is naturally avoided if possible.

There was a moment's pause, and then the carpenter ascended from the steerage, carrying a plank which he turned over and over in his hands as though its smoothness and whiteness redeemed to his notions the object for which it was required. He handed it to Tom Tute, who had followed him from below. The old sailor took it without even looking at it; and, balancing it on his shoulder, strode with a rolling gait towards the ladies' cabin. Many eyes watched the plank, and the head disappearing downwards lower and lower, until both were out of sight. And then the same eyes watched still more intently for their reappearance. At last, a dark head rose, but instead of Tom Tute's appeared the stolid, pale, black-whiskered face of the mate; who turned from time to time, as though giving directions, and restraining from a too hasty appearance those who were following. Then

the captain, who knew his time had come, hemmed and hawed two or three times, looked uneasily round, took another glance of the sky, and found some comfort apparently there, for he at once plunged into the duty he had undertaken, which was no other than to read the affecting, beautiful, and solemn burial service of the Church of England. All the hearers started at the unwonted sound, which, though long expected, came not the less strangely from the unlettered captain's Stentorian voice. He read with feeling if not with taste. His manner was rude, but it was evident there was a certain manly tenderness of heart below, for now and then there was a pause, and a glance towards the anguished mother, and a softer inflexion of the not naturally soft tones as he resumed.

Mrs. Dalrymple and Phœbe had simultaneously looked at each other as they heard the captain's first few words, which seemed to disturb them; then hastily making the sign of the cross, they began to mutter to themselves.

And still the eyes of the crew turned towards the cabin. Presently was heard the tread of a heavy,

careful foot, and the rope banister began to shake as if grasped below by an unsteady hand; then, before anything else, appeared the hand emerging above the stairs, clasping the rope, and looking rough and horny in the broad sunlight. They watched it make two moves upwards along the rope, and then rose a bare head, with a face looking downwards. A step higher and Tom Tute came out with the white plank on his shoulder, and on the plank all that remained of Poor Phœbe's child. He crossed the deck to that part of the vessel's side which Jack had cleared, and rested his double burden across the bulwark, and then stood still, with the same immovable face as ever. A rustling of silk was now heard; and the sailors, who had come near to give a look at the white little face—white and cold, and dead as marble—drew back respectfully to a distant part of the ship. The captain continued to read, though ever and anon he could not help glancing about, and always as he did so lost his place, and grew confused in the finding. Mrs. Dalrymple gave one long, fixed look, stooped and kissed the pale clay, then turned

and resumed her place under the awning, and drew her rosary from beneath her cloak. She evidently expected Phœbe would now give her the child, and go to take her last farewell also. But the bereaved mother only gazed towards the dead babe and stooped low, and huddled more and more yearningly to her breast the living child that lay across her knees crowing and laughing in the poor nurse's face. Mrs. Dalrymple was about to remind her how rapidly the time of her babe's presence was fleeting away, when, to the surprise of all on board a loud and vigorous hail was heard near at hand.

‘Ship ahoy! Black Gull, ahoy!’

‘Ay, ay! what cheer? What's amiss now?’ replied the captain, in his natural tone, and forgetting in an instant the solemnity in which he had been engaged.

‘Hold hard! we want to come on board!’

‘Hold hard!’ echoed the captain. ‘I thought we'd had enough o' that these six days past.’ Then, raising his voice, he cried out, ‘Make haste, for if a wind rises I wouldn't stop for King George himself, and I s'pose you haven't got him with you.’

But what ails the lady, as she listens and turns to even a deeper paleness than that which usually overspreads her face? Hurriedly she whispers to Phœbe,

'We are pursued. It is either my husband who comes or some one sent by him. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?' She began to wring her hands.

The captain suddenly came up to her, and said bluntly,

'You have nothing to fear. No one shall touch you if you do not wish to go back.'

'Oh, it is not me, it is the child—the child he wants.'

'Then give the word, and the child he shall not have. Here!' said he, in his usual tone of command, 'Tom Tute, go back all of you out of ear-shot, but where you can see if you are wanted.' All the sailors drew back, but looked uncommonly inquisitive; and as though the incident was, as Tom Tute had phrased it, a godsend to men six days becalmed.

'Now, madam,' said the captain, 'if you will only be so good as to tell me what you wish to be done

we can proceed safely to action. They will be on deck in another five minutes.'

But Mrs. Dalrymple seemed lost in the double anguish of being obliged to stand before her husband or her husband's messenger in a rebellious, defying mood, or to choose as the only alternative the giving up the babe, perhaps never again to see it except when grown into manhood as a confirmed heretic. She could only feebly murmur,

'Oh! is it possible to get the child away without unseemly contests or violence? Is it possible?'

The captain stopped, looked down; then, as if to get clearer insight into the case, tried to see how the weather was going on; and, in turning his eye for that purpose, it fell on the plank and the dead baby lying on the deck, the burial of which had been so unexpectedly stopped. But he did not like to say what he thought, and so gazed dubiously towards the lady, who seemed to divine he had a thought, and who said,

'Speak! What is it?'

The captain pointed to the little mummy-like figure, and then towards the approaching boat, which

was very near ; so near that Mrs. Dalrymple saw that her husband was not in it. She understood the gesture in an instant ; and looked inquiringly at Phœbe, who had listened with strange interest to the conversation, and who now simply nodded in answer.

‘I will manage it,’ continued the captain. ‘Say as little as you can, if you please, both of you. But could you not change the dress?’

Scarcely had the words quitted his lips than Phœbe, her eyes blazing with wild light, gave the living babe into its mother’s arms, saying,

‘Strip him, quick, quick ! I will be back in an instant.’ She then flew to the cabin, and, before the mother’s trembling fingers had succeeded in their task, Phœbe had again got hold of the still smiling babe, and with almost magical celerity had put upon its rosy limbs the humble-looking and well-worn garments that were no longer needed by their true owner.

The moment this was accomplished, she again gave the living child to the mother to hold while she stripped off the sheet from the dead one, and invested it in all the rich, delicate, and lace-adorned habili-

ments that she had obtained by the exchange. She then once more replaced the sheet, with the heavy roundshot that she found enclosed, and went back to the awning to receive again into her arms the only thing for which she now seemed to care.

Mrs. Dalrymple tried to smile in Phœbe's face as their eyes met, but the smile was so wan and ghastly that it was, perhaps, as well Phœbe took little heed of it. She had again got the dear burden in her arms, was again rocking it and herself to and fro, again gazing on the plank and that which it bore, and again apparently reckless of whatever might happen, so that she and her grief and it were not interfered with.

'I'll take care the lads say nothing till we're off, and then it won't matter,' observed the captain.

'No, no!' said Mrs. Dalrymple; 'and I will let my husband know the truth at the earliest possible moment.'

'They are here,' said the captain, in a low voice; and he went forward to meet the men, who now ascended to the deck.

CHAPTER III.

A PARLEY AND SURRENDER.

THE new-comers were a gentlemanly-looking short man in black of about thirty; and a much younger-looking person who had about him all the unmistakable aroma of the law, and was, indeed, a lawyer's clerk. As soon as the gentleman in black caught sight of Mrs. Dalrymple, he went to her, and, taking off his hat, said, in a silvery voice, and with a smile on his dark face that had nothing in it presuming, but a great deal that was peculiar,

‘I beg your pardon, madam, but I come from Mr. Dalrymple with an earnest and urgent request—*request* only, my dear madam’—he carefully emphasized and modulated the sound of the word—‘that you will return.’ So saying, Mr. Pample ceased to smile, and waited to see how it had succeeded. We have called his smile peculiar. It was strangely

sweet while it lasted, and made you fancy all kinds of spiritual graces behind. But it would come and go with painful suddenness, with no transition between the two states, and with no apparent congruity. Mrs. Dalrymple did not respond to the smile. She said, with almost an effort of haughtiness,

‘For what reasons, Mr. Pample, may I ask, does my husband thus send after me? Has anything occurred since we parted? Pray speak plainly, whatever you may have to say. The captain is my friend, and his presence need be no bar.’

‘Oh, of course not,’ said Mr. Pample, as the captain was turned to, and had the especial benefit of the silvery tones and the gentle, winning smile. ‘I was simply instructed to desire your immediate return.’

‘And if I refused—that is, if I found it impossible to comply, under existing circumstances—what then?’

‘Why, then, my dear madam, much as I should regret Mr. Dalrymple’s disappointment, we must content ourselves with simply taking back the child. Upon that head my orders are imperative. Nay,

my dear madam,' Mr. Pample interrupted, with raised hand and humble, deprecating look, 'consider, I pray you, the head of so ancient a family—a man advancing in years—his only child—heir to such large and unincumbered estates!'

But it was Mrs. Dalrymple who now interrupted.

'I think, sir, you might have given Mr. Dalrymple's wife credit for having thought of all these things before she would have taken the step she did take, and for which, I presume, you do not expect from me, Mr. Pample, as my husband's steward, either apologies or explanations.'

'I, my dear madam, I?' responded Mr. Pample, with arched eyebrows, and a shade erasing, as before, the constant smile from his face, as if its owner estimated mechanically the exact moment when it was proper for it to depart. 'I beg you to believe that I never in my life before undertook so painful a duty, and that in the doing it I can have but one hope, one alleviation, that *you* will feel when all is over, that I shall have done it in a spirit of entire devotion to the interests of the family.'

He turned, as he said this, feeling his arm plucked : it was the captain, who asked,

‘ Do you know what I was doing when you hailed us?’

‘ No.’

‘ I was reading the Burial Service for the Dead.’

‘ The what? Gracious goodness!—the dead! You do not mean—’

The captain stepped a little aside from the place he had intentionally occupied, and pointed to the white plank and its white burden then first made visible to the strangers.

‘ Is it possible? Dear me! dear me!’ exclaimed Mr. Pample, going towards the dead babe, but casting as he went a rapid and piercing glance at Phœbe and the child she was nursing. Phœbe had quelled all her strong passion under the sense of her mistress’s position and difficulty, and now looked (as she answered Mr. Pample’s curious glance) just what the nurse of the dead infant might be supposed to look. So he went towards the little mummy-like figure, looked at it steadily, undid the sheet till he caught sight of the lace-edged garment

beneath, which seemed to remove from his mind the last lingering doubt—if, indeed, any had entered it. But, of course, he was naturally surprised at so sudden and unexpected a conclusion to his mission; and, as a man of the world, ran over in his secret thoughts all possibilities in contradiction before he would receive as true the facts presented to him. But he turned now evidently quite satisfied, and said,

‘ I deeply regret that my presence here has given additional pain—by interrupting so sad a ceremony. But may I ask why the child was to have been buried at sea when the vessel could so easily have returned to land ? ’

The captain turned a little red in the face as he heard this, and said brusquely, ‘ If you have your duty to perform, so have I mine. Don’t you think my owners have reason enough to complain already with this cursed calm ? I can’t get forwards, it seems ; but d— me if any earthly power makes me go back ! ’

‘ True, quite true ! ’ observed Mr. Pample, pensively, and the smile just flickered over his face, but did not seem to think the occasion quite strong enough to warrant its coming forth, so withdrew

shiveringly. 'But as I am now here, and am going back, would it not, my dear madam, be more consonant to your feelings, as it would certainly be to Mr. Dalrymple's, to have it properly interred in the family church and grave?'

The question seemed to perplex the lady to whom it was addressed. She could, she felt, neither evade the suggestion, nor object to it, without perilling the object she held so dear. But what about Phœbe? She could not, in the presence of Mr. Pample, ask her, yet felt she ought to be asked, and that it was dangerous to speak to her on such a subject, lest the floodgates of her grief should give way, and so again the nearly successful scheme be spoiled. But Phœbe, who seemed to be quickening as with a new life since the visit of the steward, did not wait to be spoken to. She said simply, and as though it were merely said in humble affection,

'Oh, do ma'am, please; I am sure it will be best.'

Mrs. Dalrymple bent her head in consent to Mr. Pample, who called forward his satellite, and the two together took up the little burden and bore it

to the vessel's side. There they lowered it to the sailors in the boat. Mr. Pample, who seemed always to know as exactly when not to speak as to speak, again uncovered and bowed to his lady with deep respect, and at once withdrew.

Phœbe watched them depart, and again began to rock to and fro, and never shifted her gaze till the boat became a mere spot in the waters; and then the spot an uncertain film that she could and she could not see; and at last even that disappeared. But she still followed it, not only to the shore but to the hotel, and along the road, and into her native village, and past her own home, for it was not to stay there—no, it was to go on to the Hall, and there, perhaps, lie in a kind of state, and then be buried, not with such maimed rites as were lately in progress, but in the squire's own vault in the chancel of the old church itself; and there would be rich and numerous mourners, and the rector would be there—he would not leave such a burial to his poor, half-starved curate; and so her babe—hers, Phœbe Waterman's child—would go to his last resting-place!

His last? Was that so sure? When the deception was exposed would not the poor sinless babe be taken up again, and removed with ignominy? The mother's teeth set hard as that part of her vision unrolled itself, and she could almost have shrieked out to those who bore her child away to tell them it was hers, and that they had no right to it. But, she knew there was no retractation possible now. Well, if these things were wrong, was she to blame? Did she not follow faithfully one who was well able to keep her from going astray? She began to kiss the boy and try to forget all but him; but at that moment Mrs. Dalrymple bent down and whispered, 'Oh, Phœbe, my mind misgives me strangely about all this. Come, I grow chill! Let us retire for the night!'

As they went they heard the captain's loud voice break forth, almost triumphantly,

'All hands on deck! It's coming, boys, at last; and I'm greatly deceived if we shan't now have one general settlement in full for all the deficiencies of the last six days.'

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE CABIN AT NIGHT.

THE captain's expectations were not altogether justified for some hours. Light, baffling winds, now from one direction, now from another, just rose, lifted and swelled the sails, and gave a kind of faint push to the hull of the vessel ; but then they died away,—to repeat the process after a time with little increase of effect.

Mrs. Dalrymple, still weak from her recent illness, and made worse by the agitation of her interview with Mr. Pample, lay on a couch in the little, dimly-lighted cabin, looking from time to time on Phœbe and the child, as the latter was being undressed and put to bed. But her thoughts were not with them. She was reviewing all the incidents of the last few days ; was calling up once more the reasons that had impelled her to such a

serious course, and she was strangely shaken to find that, while the former seemed to become even more momentous than she had anticipated, the latter seemed to be no longer a full justification.

Vainly in her alarm did she repeat again and again all the old arguments ; they fell dead upon her soul. The only reflection that promised the least comfort was the idea that it was her body, not her mind, that was in fault. She had overtaken her strength. She would think no more to-night. She would sleep, and, doubtless, all things would resume their former aspect when she waked on the morrow.

But it was hard to sleep in such a place. The sound of the water against the vessel's side, the occasional heavy thump and roll when the lazy sea was disturbed into action by some fitful but almost as lazy gust, the tramp of the feet over head, the rattling of chains, the shouts of the captain who tried to make the most of every puff to get a bit farther on, all this jarred and agitated her, and kept her long awake in all the torture of restless thoughts and profound self-dissatisfaction.

And when she did lose consciousness at last, it was only to wake a in few minutes bathed in cold perspiration, trembling in every limb, and for some time vainly striving to pronounce the word 'Phœbe! Phœbe!' But the watchful nurse, in whom an all-powerful engrossing love for the child seemed to supply the place alike of food and sleep, heard her low moaning, and came to her.

Mrs. Dalrymple took and pressed the outstretched hand, and with touching humility even kissed it. Her own touch was so death-like that Phœbe was glad when their hands were again separated. Presently, her mistress said,

'Oh, Phœbe! I have had a dream, too terrible for me to relate.' She stopped and almost began to laugh hysterically, but checked herself in time, and went on more calmly. 'Oh, Phœbe, God's hand is upon me. I feel it. I have done wrong. I have wounded, cruelly wounded, my husband. And I am already stricken through you. One child has gone; perhaps even now the dread fiat has gone forth not to spare the other.'

Phœbe stared in her mistress's face, but there was

in her own eyes a wandering light that showed she was not thinking merely of that which she heard.

‘Oh, Phœbe! I cannot any longer resist this inward monitor. Wishing to do right, I can no longer be sure I have not done wrong. If so, can I with justice take this boy away from him?’

‘Would you,’ asked Phœbe, in low, measured tones, as if she weighed each of them most accurately as they passed from her lips, ‘would you send him back?’

‘Yes, oh yes! with you.’

Mrs. Dalrymple did not see the fierce gleam of joy that shot through the dark, glistening, eager eyes; or she would, perhaps, in the natural jealousy of a mother’s affection, have paused in her new undertaking.

‘You would, I know,’ she resumed, ‘be to him all that anyone but his own mother could.’

‘Oh, ma’am! I would indeed, and indeed.’

‘And I shall ask Mr. Dalrymple to leave him in your charge as long as possible, a request that I am quite sure he will not disregard.’

‘And when,’ — began Phœbe.

‘Oh! at once—at once! I dare not trust myself with delay. Do you not think I am right? I know it is against all we have said, and thought, and done; but do you not think it right, under all the circumstances? Oh, Phœbe! I am inexpressibly shocked and humiliated by all this deception and falsehood. Ah, yes, my eyes are opened! Help me up! I will at once seek the captain; and, before we have lost sight of our own dear English land, you and my boy shall go back; and then, perhaps, I may rest in peace—perhaps in a few months return in a happier frame of mind.’

In a few minutes the two women both appeared on the deck, to the great surprise of the captain, who was still apparently whistling (a habit of his) for the wind that was unwilling to come, but that did appear to be coming at last. It was the grey time of dawn. The feeble stars were dying out. A rosy light was just tinging the eastern sky above the line of coast.

In few words Mrs. Dalrymple told the captain she wished to get Phœbe and the child returned to shore, and begged him to manage it as he best

could. He seemed surprised, but not altogether sorry. Perhaps he was secretly glad to get rid of such troublesome passengers, and he had his misgivings about the propriety of the business of the preceding evening. But he was short and businesslike in his answer. He must be excused going back, for any reason whatever, but he would put the two safely on board one of the vessels that were now slowly passing into the nearest port. He did not wait for acquiescence, but, seizing a trumpet, hailed the nearest brig, which for some time did not or would not hear, but at last altered her course, came near, and demanded what was wanted.

‘To put a woman and child aboard for your harbour. You’ll be well paid.’ The captain gave all the strength of his lungs to the last assurance. There was a short silence before any reply was returned, but at last a voice called out,

‘All right! We’ll send a boat. The gale’s rising. Look alive!’

The two women hurried down into the cabin, where Mrs. Dalrymple began to write a letter to her husband, while Phœbe collected the child’s

and her own clothes. Long before Mrs. Dalrymple had finished and dried the tear-bedewed epistle, which she seemed to feel might be her last communication with her husband, Phœbe had got the luggage into the boat, and was waiting on the deck, with the boy, begging the sailors to be patient, who were threatening to return if they were kept waiting another minute.

‘Ay, ay!’ remarked the captain, approvingly. ‘This is no time for dawdling or letter-writing. I have been expecting this breeze ever since last night. And, though I was mistaken then, I shan’t be mistaken now.’

The wind was whistling through the cordage, as though in response to the captain’s own favourite note, the sails were bellying and flapping furiously, the ‘Black Gull’ was rolling vigorously to and fro, and the boat was dashing against the black sides in a manner that produced deep oaths and execrations from those who were in it, when Mrs. Dalrymple at last appeared. Every trace of colour or life had vanished from her face and bloodless lips; but she held out to Phœbe a little package, apparently a

book, accompanying the letter, which for better protection she had cased in oiled silk; and then, taking the boy in her arms, embraced him in a long, deep, and quivering silence; and, when the captain touched her, and she saw him standing there waiting, she resigned the precious burden to Phœbe, who took it with an eagerness she hardly cared to conceal; then Mrs. Dalrymple kissed Phœbe and dropped her hand on the bulwarks, and there waited in deep silence the departure.

This was now no easy matter. The boat kept dancing up and down in a manner sufficiently alarming to the poor mother, but she saw the captain hand the child down to the man who was in charge of the boat's crew, and who instantly took a seat. Phœbe was in the same way handed down, though she rather leaped than was lifted into the boat, whether from eagerness or the lurching of the vessel no one knew. An instant more, and the boat-hooks and ropes were let go, and the boat was skimming across the tops of the waves towards the expectant ship.

Half-an-hour afterwards a handkerchief waved

from the deck of the 'Black Gull,' and was answered by another similarly waved from the deck of the 'Marco Polo;' and mother and child, mistress and maid, parted.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOAT OF THE 'MARCO POLO.'

ALREADY, as the boat left the sides of the 'Black Gull,' its occupants had a foretaste of the coming storm. It rolled fearfully to and fro, progress became more and more difficult, and what little way the crew made was more than counterbalanced by the involuntary movements of the ship which they were trying to reach. The fitful gusts of wind were now occurring so frequently, and with so much violence, that the 'Marco Polo' found it impossible to wait quietly in its original position for the return of the boat, which still laboured heavily on, changing its course just as it saw the 'Marco Polo' change. At first Phœbe saw nothing—thought of nothing but the babe she held in her arms, and which she seemed to treasure with as new a sense of glad possession as if she had just found some costly gem which would

make all life easy henceforward by its value. But when the sailors, growing fatigued with their apparently useless exertions, began to murmur among themselves, she looked up, and scanned their weather-beaten and gloomy faces with growing alarm. One or two she thought scowled at her, as though she and the child were the cause of their difficulty and possible danger. She looked back. The 'Black Gull' seemed already a long way off; but there was still the form of Mrs. Dalrymple standing fixed by the bulwarks just where Phœbe had left her. She was interrupted in her gaze by a furious blast which took away her breath, forced the boat for a moment under the waves, and drenched the whole crew. Their position grew more and more desperate. The 'Marco Polo' was evidently getting farther away, and seemed to be rocking about as though it had lost all control over its own career. The day began to grow cold and dark, and the rain to fall heavily, which greatly increased Phœbe's discomfort by the violence with which it was every now and then blown into her face, so that she could scarcely lift her head and open her eyes without being blinded by the

driving shower, which seemed equally compounded of rain and salt sea-spray. Worst of all, the babe, she fancied, was shivering at her breast, though she had drawn her shawl tightly round it, and tried to make her circling arms additional sources of warmth and comfort.

Hours passed, and still the gale increased, till at times it blew with all the force of a hurricane. The men sullenly refused any longer to ply the oars, which, indeed, had become obviously useless. The afternoon brought no change. Evening drew on and still they tossed helplessly on the weltering sea. The lightning now began to burst upon them in vivid flashes, and lit up the increasing and awful darkness with a still more awful splendour. A little while longer and they could no longer see the 'Marco Polo,' except when it happened to be shown by one of those lightning gleams. Everywhere around spread a white foam that had a painfully-attractive look under the fitful flashes from the sky: it seemed so like a sinister smile upon a false face which knows death impends over a hated object. Phœbe now caught at intervals through the wild

uproar of the elements the sound of prayer. It was one of the younger sailors, who prayed in a tone of deep anguish. Another, in apparent calmness, was explaining to his companion what he was to do for him if the speaker should be lost and the listener saved.

'I'll do as much for you, Jack, if the luck goes with me.'

'Ay, ay, all right! Tell my wife if she goes to the agent's she'll find I didn't forget her in case o' accidents like this.'

While Phœbe listened to this terrible talk on the part of her nearest neighbours, she felt strangely unconscious of her own danger, though exquisitely alive to whatever threatened the child; or, rather, she seemed to feel that she must and should, somehow or other, in spite of all difficulties, secure her precious burden, and that, if she did so, her own security would, as a matter of course, form a part of the transaction. But it was the babe she thought of, feared for, not herself.

But, as she pondered over the question of what she could and would do, with an intellect full of

eager, active will, and as she freed her right arm so that it might be ready for any emergency, she was suddenly recalled to her fellow-passengers by the cry, 'Hold hard! Breakers! We're going on shore!' The words had scarcely passed the man's lips before the boat grazed on a rock, toppled over, was buried under a great wave, and when it emerged, was bottom upwards, with all its crew floating in the water. Phœbe had scarcely time to draw breath, to lift the child aloft, and take one hurried glance landwards, before she felt herself again overwhelmed by a billowy, white-crested, gigantic wave. But that single glance had shown to Phœbe something—she knew not what—but at which she had clutched with all the vigorous frenzy of despair. She caught it, and knew no more until she again felt herself rapidly rising from the water, when she was aware of her prize—one of the oars of the boat, which she had grasped so firmly that not all the rush, and tumult, and alarm of the subsequent immersion had caused her fingers to relax their hold. This and her clothes made her so buoyant that she was able almost continuously to keep

the child's head above water, even when she herself was too deeply immersed to be able to breathe; and the very wind, which had done so much injury by blowing the ship resistlessly landwards, now helped her. She soon felt her feet touch the ground; and that fact cheered her to bear with new hope and fortitude the frightful oncoming of wave after wave, which she always met in the same gallant fashion, with the child raised aloft as long as possible before the critical moment came, and restored to its position instantly after when the swell had subsided. And so, at last, panting and utterly exhausted, she found herself on her knees, letting go her hold of the oar, and digging her disengaged hand into the beach, that she might hold there until the next wave passed. It did so, and, helped by the tremendous landward rush of the water, she found herself still farther up on the shore, until at last she crawled a few yards farther, and dropped senseless on the sand, unconscious of her victory, if she had indeed saved both lives, still more happily unconscious of defeat if the babe were dead and she dying.

CHAPTER VI.

WASHED ASHORE.

WHEN Phœbe came to herself she found bending over her two persons, a fisherman and his wife, the latter having a kindly face, which, dimly as it could be seen through the gloom, appeared illumined with gladness as she saw the poor shipwrecked creature at her feet revive.

‘Stand by, old woman!’ said the fisherman, gazing intently in Phœbe’s face, ‘stand by! she’s a heavin’ to.’

He slipped his arm under her, and, raising her head from the stones, said gently,

‘Awast, lass! What cheer? what cheer, sweetheart?’

Phœbe tried to answer him, but was unable to speak. Life was returning, no doubt, but as yet so slowly and painfully that it gave the weary frame a

sensation more akin to that of ordinary death. But while there passed gradually over the pallid face a kind of spasmodic play, and the nerveless lips seemed vainly trying to fashion themselves to the almost forgotten power of speech, there came through them unexpectedly a feeble wail, followed by an attempt to move the utterly helpless body; and, while the eye began to burn once more with its old fierce brightness, she murmured,

‘The baby! the baby! Is it —’

‘Ay, ay, poor body, safe and well in the little black house, yonder. When your a bit better we’ll take you on there.’

Phœbe dropped back thankful but exhausted, and again closed her eyes, while the fisherman’s wife gently tried to force open her lips and get some brandy down her throat. She succeeded in making her swallow a few drops, and wonderful indeed was their reviving power. Colour came back to the cheek, movement to the limbs, vivacity to the re-opened eye; and almost before the fisherman and his wife were aware of their success they saw Phœbe sitting up, and looking about her as though

all that had passed had been only a painful dream.

‘ You didn’t deceive me ? ’

The woman returned her fierce, doubting gaze with a smile of pity.

‘ Me deceive you, my poor lass ! Ain’t I a mother ? Ain’t my own boy a tossin’ on the water this same awful night ? How, then, could I go for to deceive you ? Ay, your boy’s well enough, though he won’t stop crying a minute for anybody, bless him ! We can’t none of us quiet him. He knows his mammy ain’t there. ’

Was it that Phœbe did not yet feel herself strong enough to hold further conversation, or that there was something so pleasing in the illusion of being supposed to be the mother of the boy that she did not care to destroy it ? She looked down as though her head were yet heavy, and when she again raised it, it was to turn and glance towards the wild sea, where the white foam below and the black sky above were all she could now distinguish.

‘ Ay, it’s been a evening, this have, ’ said the fisherman, who had noticed her furtive yet eager gaze

seawards. 'And it'll be a night, this will, a night as 'll send ugly things ashore, Lord help us! Come missus, can you get the poor soul on her feet? What say you, lass, can you heave-to to where yon light's a burning? Come, old woman, lend a hand, will you?'

And, so saying, the fisherman wound his strong arm about Phœbe, and raised her to her feet; but she was so giddy that she would have fallen but for the careful support of her two stranger friends. Again before starting they tried to persuade her to drink from the bottle. Phœbe pushed it away with a gesture of dislike; and then, moved by some new impulse, snatched it greedily, and, to the surprise of its owners, drank from it as though it contained but so much water. The man looked at his wife with an odd mixture of humour and apprehension, but she seemed by her woman's instinct to understand the act, and said,

'A brave pull, my lass! but you are in the right on't. I've seen many a poor drenched lady afore you fly to drink like that, as if they'd been born drunkards, which I am sure you ain't.'

'Ay,' said her husband, 'and it's just as nat'ral

as it is that a ship should lean-to to a foul wind if there ain't a fair one blowin'.'

And, apparently struck by the truth of the simile, the two remained silent for some minutes, as they walked slowly along the sands, leading and almost lifting Phœbe between them.

'How many were there in the boat?' asked the fisherman presently.

'Six, I think ; yes, six men,' slowly replied Phœbe, trying to recall the collective image of the crew as she had seen it under such exciting circumstances.

'Ay ! well, then, they're all safe, for I counted just six on 'em straggling along the beach, like so many drunken men.'

'And which way did they go?' inquired Phœbe, with sudden interest.

'Yonder,' asked the fisherman, jerking his thumb in a particular direction along the coast-line. 'They seemed to be on the look-out for a ship. Had they left one to bring you ashore?'

'Yes ;' responded Phœbe, not taking the trouble to correct the partial inaccuracy of the terms of the question and answer.

‘Ay! Well, they’re in the right direction to find her, if she outlives this night; and a night it will be, too.’

Again Phœbe stopped, and looked round towards the sea, but not in the direction the sailors had gone. She was looking after another vessel, and straining her eyes through the darkness after a familiar form, that of her mistress. But no natural manifestation of alarm for the safety of that lady, no passionate expressions of the affection she had always professed to feel for her, and which, possibly, she had really felt when she said so, now trembled on her lips, or disturbed her faltering steps. Some all-absorbing, preoccupying thought appeared to shut out everything else; presently she said,

‘Oh, shall we never reach him? Don’t you hear him crying, so piercing, so faint? Oh, make haste! He’ll kill himself if I don’t get to him. Take me on! Make me go faster! I can! I will!’

And so at last they all reached the little hut built by the side of a ravine, through which some small stream or river ran down to the sea.

But now a new fear reached the heart of Phœbe.

Either the child had ceased its cries, or she had been deceived. Everything was silent within. The fisherman's wife felt the poor woman whom she held tremble and shiver as she whispered,

‘He’s quiet, quite quiet! O God! you havn’t deceived me after all, just to get me here?’

There was no time for answer, for as they reached the door Phœbe broke away from them, lifted the latch, went in, cast a hurried glance round, saw a little cot near the fire, glided to it, dropped on her knees, looked at the face, saw it was indeed the boy himself, in a sleep that had followed his utter exhaustion, and she could contain herself no longer. She passionately stretched her arms over the little form, and sobbed aloud as she murmured the words,

‘Safe! safe! safe!’

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST OF THE 'BLACK GULL.'

THE certainty of the boy's safety, combined with some inner feeling which gave at once an elasticity to Phœbe's frame and a furtiveness to her look, did even more than the warmth and the nourishing supper of porridge to bring back the nurse's strength and equanimity. By degrees she told her host how she had gone with her child from Plymouth on board the 'Black Gull' to accompany her mistress on a foreign voyage; how they had altered their minds, and hailed the 'Marco Polo;' and how she and the babe had been wrecked while passing from one to the other. But somehow she did not in her narrative mention the death of her own child, or say one word about the child of her mistress, an omission the more remarkable seeing that Phœbe, whether from fatigue or intention, spoke very slowly

and deliberately. On the other hand, she said nothing to contradict the facts omitted from her narrative.

Pleading great and natural desire for rest, Phœbe soon went to bed, for, the fisherman's son being absent, there was a little boxed-in sort of place at her service, that reminded her of the berth in the cabin of the 'Black Gull.' And it seemed, through that very recollection and the many other recollections it awakened, to keep Phœbe tossing about uneasily and wearily, desiring at once the power to go to sleep without any more agitating thoughts, and yet desiring to track through all their dim recesses and lurking-places the shapeless, half-formed fancies that alternately moved her on and drove her back as they more or less revealed themselves out of the surrounding mental darkness. But, whatever the nature of her secret cogitations, they seemed at last to end in a kind of prayer, which she half murmured aloud, for the safety of her mistress in the still-raging storm. That over, Phœbe seemed to turn with increased zest to the baby, who hung at her breast, until a warning cry told her how she was in-

juring the life which she so passionately and fiercely loved.

But they both slept at last.

When Phœbe woke in the morning, the war of the elements was continuing with such unmitigated violence that her first impression was that she was herself, in some way or other, still exposed to them. But she smiled as she looked on the babe, and saw it smile in her face, and for the moment there was not a care in the world. For Phœbe just then there was neither storm nor trouble. She had the babe which replaced to her the lost one, and she heeded nothing else.

Hearing her stir, the woman came to her, saying, 'Sad work, my lass, sad work! Here's a ship nearing the bay. They can't keep her off. O dear! O dear! the whole beach already is covered with the ruins o' this night. And my boy—my first child, as I love like you love yours, is out yet in one of the smacks. Lord, help us! Lord, help us! but the sea's a hard master. Will you come out, lass, and see if it's your ship?'

Before many minutes had passed, Phœbe and the

fisherman's wife were hurrying down towards the beach, leaving the child in the care of the neighbour who had so carefully tended it the evening before.

Yes, there was a ship tumbling and heaving about among the breakers, only two or three miles distant ; and Phœbe fancied she saw the figure of Mrs. Dalrymple, in the same dress and almost in the same attitude in which she had last seen her. But she could not be sure that it was her, or even that it was the 'Black Gull.' With intense anxiety she watched and watched. But as the ship remained in the same spot, getting no nearer to the shore, they began to understand that she must be fast grounded. The fisherman, after a careful glance all round, said to his wife,

'I think the lad's safe. The Lord's give him the sense to get far enough out in time. But yon big ship's got the black cap on, as one may say. She *may* get off from where she is, but it'll only be to get driv' in nearer, and then— Awast! see there! see there!'

The vessel had got away, and began to move more freely, as if in deep water ; but the furious gusts

soon impelled her on in the same line of destruction as before. She came nearer and nearer. And now Phœbe knew it was the 'Black Gull' by the broad white horizontal streak with which her builder had decorated the otherwise gloomy-looking vessel. And still it came; and, it seemed to Phœbe, would reach the shore in safety, and she was glad—truly glad; and before she had time to check the impulse, said aloud, 'Oh, now if she's but saved, I too am saved! God grant it! O God, grant it!' Then, a moment after, remembering herself, she turned to her companions, but saw they were intent on the sad spectacle around them. The beach was strewn thickly over with wreck—spars of vessels, broken boats, hencoops; even articles of furniture—chairs—but all broken; the keyboard of a piano, books, bundles of documents, loose letters flying about, exposing possibly secrets the writers had never dreamed of being made known to a single human being beyond the persons to whom they were confided.

But again their eyes were drawn towards the vessel. And now Phœbe was certain she saw Mrs. Dalrymple on the deck, waving her hands, whether

in prayer to Heaven or in recognition of her nurse on the beach, the latter could not possibly discover. But the three spectators soon perceived that the vessel was again grounded and rocking to and fro in a terrible manner, while the sea washed over it continually. Phœbe groaned in anguish, and now at last forgot all but her kind and confiding mistress. She held out her hands, she waved her scarf, she sent forth her voice trying to make it convey some word or tone of comfort ; but the hubbub of the storm silenced such puny sounds ; and all that Phœbe could do was to fix her eyes, as though under some terrible fascination, upon that slight, graceful figure as it reappeared every few moments from out of the caldron of seething foam. The ' Black Gull ' had been strongly built, and she had before now weathered many a terrific gale, but her last hour had come. No work of human hands could live long in such a position. The masts went first, and with them went full half the small crew, who had mounted high in the hope of getting above the incessant seas which washed over the deck, and to get an outlook that might possibly be of service when the last

struggle for dear life must take place. A few minutes later, and the ship divided into two pieces right before the eyes of the stricken spectators; one part went rolling away and disappeared, the other and larger part remained towering above the rock on which it had grounded, and upon that piece was Mrs. Dalrymple, now apparently the only living soul on the melancholy deck. She looked so moveless that Phœbe began to fancy she must be dead, and only retained her standing posture through the fastenings that she had probably caused the sailors to throw about her to enable her to keep her place on the rocking slopes of the deck. Again Phœbe tried to make her voice reach. And there was a feeble gesture that seemed to be an answer—a sort of half-raising of the arm and a movement of the hand, as though to wave it, and that was all. The limb dropped to the side, and the whole figure kept its motionless but upright state as before.

Phœbe was not left much longer in her agony of suspense. A tremendous sea caught the mutilated wreck, seemed to shake it violently to and fro in its strong grasp, as though to dissolve out of it what-

ever principle of strength might yet remain, and then, falling away, exposed, once more and for the last time, the half-deck of the 'Black Gull' and of Mrs. Dalrymple's figure, with her head drooping on one side. Scarcely had another minute elapsed before the immense black piece of wreck dropped asunder in countless pieces, and was floating on, or buried beneath the waves.

For hours the three remained on the beach watching to see if any dead bodies would be thrown up on the beach. But they saw none. And neither then nor afterwards—neither in life nor in death—did a single one of all the crew and passengers of the 'Black Gull' reach the shore, which they had thought it so impossible to quit, during the many days of the preceding calm.

CHAPTER VIII.

PHŒBE.

MELANCHOLY as the neighbourhood must have seemed to Phœbe, after all she had endured in it, she did not seem able to get away from it for a day or two after the events described in our last chapter. It might be that she did not yet feel strong enough for travel, or she may have wished to make quite sure of the fate of her mistress. Her inquiries after her and after the crew were unceasing; and always she obtained the same reply—that there was and could be no hope whatever: all were lost. She persuaded the fisherman to go up and down the beach for miles each way, to inquire; but still the report was that no single person had escaped from this the latest wreck on the coast—the wreck of the ‘Black Gull.’ At last even Phœbe herself seemed to be quite satisfied that there was no possibility of hear-

ing anything more of her deceased mistress, or of the crew with which she had sailed ; and then only it was that she began to hasten preparations for departure.

Having paid her entertainers liberally for their hospitality, who took with reluctance what she offered, though poor enough to be very grateful for such occasional assistance, and having got them to show her the way to a certain roadside inn, four or five miles distant, where she could obtain, on the morrow, a coach for Plymouth, she set off alone with the baby, refusing to allow either the man or his wife to accompany her. While she is wearily pursuing her way along the dusty road, let us glance briefly at her person, history, and character.

There were some spiteful people in her native village who maintained that it was only Phœbe Waterman's black eyes, her ready tongue, and her good notions of dress, which gave the impression of her being pretty, and perhaps they were right ; for she certainly lacked the pink and white skin which, in a Branhape girl, was thought essential to beauty. Then, too, her cheek bones were rather high, and

her mouth was large. In spite, however, of these defects, sallow complexion, high cheek bones, and large mouth, her bitterest rival was obliged to confess to herself that there was no girl in the village who could be more fascinating than Phœbe Waterman when she chose. When the blood was flushing up to her brown cheek, and her lips, bright as a scarlet geranium petal were apart smilingly, over her sound white teeth, and when her eyes instead of flashing with suspicion or ridicule as they very often did, wore a look of tenderness half yearning, half weary, then there was colour enough in her face ; and life and soul and beauty enough to turn wiser heads than those which were wont to bend in the coloured light of the windows of old Branhape church, in search of a new sensation.

Hers was one of those peculiar natures in which good and evil seem to lie in such close and intimate union that it is hardly possible to tell from which of the two their many questionable acts flow. She was of a loving but also of an exacting disposition ; and her love would be very apt to turn to hate if any injury were done to it, or was even supposed by

Phœbe to be done to it. So, also, she was honest in a peculiar and limited way. She would not for the world have stolen any person's gold or gems, but she would by no means be so particular as to their good name if they had the ill-luck to offend her. Her honesty, in fact, did not mean true principle; it was a thing of custom, of prudence, of liking; but not a spontaneous development of character that must be honest simply because it is true, straightforward, and self-controlled. Phœbe was thought as a girl to be particularly high-spirited, but there were occasions on which it was found she could do things that even people quite undistinguished by the quality would have hesitated to commit. Through these contradictory traits Phœbe grew up as one who was more feared and respected than liked or loved in the village of her birth. Suitors held aloof, or came only to retreat in a short time. And then, in a kind of wilful acknowledgment and resentment of the fact, Phœbe suddenly married the man whom she least liked of all who had inclined towards her. This was Stephen Waterman, a jobbing carpenter, a well-meaning, industrious man

of thirty, but who had no single quality calculated to win Phœbe's regard. He was evidently a poor creature in his wife's own estimation—servile to the rich, hard to those of the poor who were poorer than himself, thinking always of how to get on in the world, but never showing the least power for achieving his aim. Why, then, had she married him? Because she heard the villagers talking of her failing courtships, and of their belief that she would die an old maid. So she put down that gossip in her own fierce, impulsive way, and, afterwards, mourned inly the mistake she had made.

Under these circumstances, the marriage was not for a year or two a happy one. Her imperious temper worried Stephen so much that he began to stay out of an evening, to drink, and to neglect his work, and so gradually he lost position as a jobbing master carpenter, and was obliged to shut up his little workshop in the neighbouring field and go out as a journeyman. This only increased Phœbe's disgust. But when the squire married and brought home his Roman Catholic bride, and Phœbe, also a Catholic, was chosen to be her maid, things grew

brighter in the cottage of the Watermans as well as in the mansion of the Dalrymples. Phœbe found in her mistress just the kind of person who could best bring forth, alike for good and evil, all the latent characteristics of her nature. Mrs. Dalrymple did not see Phœbe's faults, and she more than appreciated her merits. A great confidence arose between them. It wonderfully suited Phœbe's proud disposition to be so treated. And, in return, she became passionately attached to her gentle and winning mistress. After a while a new bond united them. Within a short time of each other they both bore children, and both sons; but the lady's constitution, unlike the more robust one of Phœbe, gave way at the critical period of maternity, and all the resources of medical skill and knowledge had to be taxed to save the lives of mother and son. Both, however, were saved. But the doctor would not allow Mrs. Dalrymple to nurse her boy; and it was then that the thought rose simultaneously in the minds of both mistress and maid that the latter might suckle the two infants. And thus it was that Phœbe found two children to love—two that seemed

to find a mother in her ; and her loving and large heart seemed only to expand and become more and more capable and happy as she gazed on the two infants on her knee, so alike in age, feature, and everything but social condition. *That* last matter Phœbe dismissed, as she did everything else that interfered with her mood or wishes, with a contemptuous scorn that forbade all further question.

How proud she looked, and with what delight she listened, as the neighbours came in and speculated as to which was the finest of the two ! She grew quite gracious, even humble, at such times. But on other occasions she would slyly exchange dresses, and try the effect on some of the village gossips ; and these, as she expected, would for the most part be just as full of wonder and admiration at the future squire she now chose to present to them as they had previously been when that young gentleman was really there in his own proper garb. And when one day, in the exuberance of her delight, she confessed the trick she had been playing, she was still more pleased by the excuse that was given for the mistake :

‘ Well, to be sure ! and this is really yours, Mrs. Waterman ! But there, o’ course, the clothes is all a person can tell ’em by ; for to anybody not seein’ ’em every hour o’ the day as you do they’re just as like as two peas, that they are, Mrs. Waterman ; bless ’em ! ’

And this birth of a child thus connected in point of time with the growing favour of the Dalrymples gave quite a new position to Phœbe as regards her husband. He began again to be sober, attentive, submissive, and respectful, and Phœbe liked his conduct so much that she almost began to think she liked him. All things, in short, contributed to give a kind of elation to Phœbe’s mind and character at this period of her history. And just then it was that she received from her mistress the letter with which our history commenced, and the consequences of which were to be so momentous.

The reader will now be in better condition than before to understand the influence of the events we have recently described ; and will be able, we hope, to follow the somewhat tortuous course of Phœbe’s thoughts on the night of the day on which we left

her struggling along with her precious burden towards the wayside inn where she was to sleep.

She has put the child to bed in the large old-fashioned four-poster in the corner of the great room ; and, as she satisfies herself he is asleep, seems to raise her arms in a kind of weariness that somehow does not appear to agree with the wandering and bright light in her eyes. There is no rest there, evidently. She sits down in a chair, but not like one who seeks the repose it may give ; on the contrary, there is an undefinable something in her attitude and gestures that suggests she feels called to immediate but difficult action. She looks restlessly first at this, and then at that object that lies in the line of her vision, but she evidently sees them not, but a something farther, the precise nature of which she vainly strives to scan. She gets up impatiently and goes to the wide window which commands a distant view of the sea ; but at the first glance she stops, draws down the blind, and turns away.

What is she trying to decide as she stands grasp-

ing the bed-post with both hands and pressing her forehead against it in such hard thought? What temptation is upon her? What temptation has been following closer and closer upon her heels ever since that motionless figure at the mast of the 'Black Gull' fell upon the stormy waters—nay, ever since the empty garments of her dead child had been filled by his living likeness?

In vain a still, small voice cries within her, 'Resist! resist! resist!' Her passionate heart makes answer, 'Has she not resisted long and bravely?' God knows she did, again and again, till she saw that everything seemed to be shaped for that very end she most desired. Why was she chosen to suckle him from the very hour of his birth? Why was she drawn away from her own home with her own child but to be ready to take care of him? Oh, she can understand now that, if for any cause her babe was doomed, God knew that she would become a desperate and wicked woman if He did not provide for her this solace? Besides, had she not bought him with her own flesh and blood? It was the voyage—she was sure of it—that killed her babe;

and she for whom she made the sacrifice could now repay her without herself feeling the cost.

But was it really true that discovery was impossible? The crew of the boat that escaped did not know but that she was the child's mother, and would be sure to think it must be so. And of the other crew that knew the truth not a soul remained alive. Was it not wonderful? And should she refuse the chance thus offered to her? The steward, too, went away from the 'Black Gull' so sure that he carried with him his master's son that no suspicions could ever arise if only she held her peace. Yes, that made a great difference. She would not need to say a word, but let other people speak for her. Why, then, not hold her peace, since that would gain all she wanted?

Ay! but the sin, the wrong, the father's double loss! But, then, must he not already have got over the grief about the child? and as to the loss of his wife, in that she could not help him.

Still she needs for her satisfaction some better reason. And is it likely (she says to herself) she should ever have conceived this thing if she had not

had a most weighty reason? What did the squire's own wife—this boy's own mother say? Stay! she would again read the letter, though knowing most of it already by heart.

Phœbe began slowly and with an almost painful effort to read Mrs. Dalrymple's letter to her, sentence by sentence, as though conscious any new meaning must escape, on account of her familiarity with its contents, unless she took it most slowly and determinedly. When she had once read it through she went back again and read aloud the following passage:—

‘Think, too, what it would be for you knowingly to let my boy suck poison from you. Yet is it a less matter to allow anyone, even a father, to poison his soul? O no!’

She had scarcely finished before she again read the sentences with a voice almost tremulous with exultation; and, when she had done so, went towards the bed and gazed long and yearningly on the slumbering babe before she again resumed the thread of her reflection.

Strange! Often as she had vaguely thought of

those words she never till now saw their full meaning, and now they came to her as from the grave. She would not hesitate. This should decide her.

And yet it did not. She still wandered about the chamber, hour after hour, full of a restless agitation that she could not allay. A new thought now attracted her, though, like all her other thoughts, it came tinged with the atmosphere of her own peculiar mind.

She would be wronging the child, God help her! That's what it was that kept her back so long. She should live to hear him curse her when he found out the secret. But he could not find it out. Ay! but how was he to grow up by her side year after year, and she to know what a secret gulf existed between them, to the edge of which they might any day unexpectedly come? But hasn't she answered that already? He cannot know, shall not know!

Well; but, if she were to be his mother henceforward, must she not act with a mother's forethought? What can she give him but poverty in exchange for his birthright of fortune? Must he grow up a workman who ought to be a gentle-

man? But that is nonsense. He shall be a gentleman! She knows she can compass that. 'Where there's a will there's a way;' and has she not the will? So it all comes back to the old point. Who but she can save him from the fate his mother so much dreaded—that of becoming a heretic?

Just then there was a noise, and the blind flapped and moved uneasily, as though some hand were moving it from behind. Phœbe gazed, and felt herself trembling as with the burden of her own overwrought fancies. She thought she saw through the blind a dark outline, strangely like the figure of her dead mistress; and for a moment she held her breath wonderingly, as if expecting to see some apparition that would indeed shake her in her guilty designs. But with a scornful laugh she repelled the absurd thought, went to the window, drew up the blind, and let it down again, after an ostentatious look-out upon the midnight sky and country. But she seemed to know what secret spring it was that had for the moment so shaken her—the remembrance that her mistress's last act and her last words had all been in direct opposition to her letter,

and that she had striven by them to make amends for her previous error.

Oh! but then Phœbe understood all that. Her good mistress was a woman, and found it easier to think the right thing than to do it. She wrote her true mind in the letter, and before she had been again enfeebled by sickness and mental distress. There was her warrant. He was her child.

‘Mine! Dost hear, darling? Thou art mine, mine only, evermore!’

So saying she went to the bed, and seemed about to kneel as in prayer and thankfulness, but somehow she stopped in time and did not add that last guilt, much as she desired it, to the act she had determined to perform.

Well, well, there was an end. Now to think how to get back to the village, how to shape her story, which she should be sick enough of telling, doubtless, before she had done with it. And, above all, how was she to meet him—the husband of her dead mistress, the father of this babe—her babe, *hers*, as she now called him?

Well, she was weary, and could sleep now, she

thought. And she would teach herself now and evermore that this had been the best day's work of her life, and it shouldn't be her fault if she didn't make it the same for him. There was wealth in the world besides that of Branhape, other distinctions than those of a country fox-hunting squire.

'Come, darling!' she cried, dropping wearily beside him; 'come, then, wake up, and give me one little smile, one precious kiss. No, no, no! Don't be frightened! There, there, there! Oh, hush, hush! my own darling! God bless the baby, how scared it looks. There, darling, there!'

She lay down, but not at once to sleep. No; for whole hours the blind flapped in and out as if agitated by the touch of a mortal hand. The wind roared, and the voice of the sea rose loud and turbulent. Phœbe pressed both hands to her ears and writhed in anguish; for henceforward she felt that that voice might ever be to her as the cry of an accusing spirit.

CHAPTER IX.

OF THE TWO ROADS—WHICH?

THE first effects of crime on character have a painful interest for all students of human nature. Crime itself is so terrible a thing in its consequences upon all those who are destined to be its victims that we may be sure it does not, while passing over the hearts and minds of the criminals, leave *them* unscathed. Apart from all questions of legal punishment, there goes on for ever a species of unseen but most certain retribution by which the wrongdoer is made to become his own judge and executioner, and which does not allow him to wait for the often slow processes of discovery and prosecution, but seems to be born with the crime itself, and to pursue it ever like its shadow. Or rather, perhaps, it may be likened to the ghost of his dead innocence which haunts him evermore, and which can neither

be spoken to nor laid by any art of man. How was it now with Phœbe?

When she woke next morning, no one who looked on her could have guessed that conscience was at work there, or that remorse of any kind was ever likely to have a place in her breast. Such an observer would have been struck, perhaps, by her strangely-subdued manner; and had he previously known Phœbe, such a trait would doubtless have appeared sufficiently startling. But in the absence of this knowledge one who watched her operations could only have said, 'Here is a kind, thoughtful, devoted mother. How absolutely her range of thought and feeling seems circumscribed within these four walls. Or if the vacant eye seems at times to pierce into something through and beyond them, it is obviously connected with the thoughts of that child's future, which naturally engage a mother's attention.'

No, there is nothing strange or peculiar now in any of Phœbe's notions. She dresses herself and babe as though nothing remarkable had ever happened to either, or was expected to happen in the

immediate future. The fact was that Phœbe had really persuaded herself she was doing no special harm by her act, and that she might be doing a great deal of good. Then, again, the time for hesitation, she thought, had passed, and the time for action come. And with Phœbe, as with all vigorous natures, action itself is a wonderful remedy for all sorts of mental troubles. So with only one present token of change—the preternatural quiet as though of a great peace or else of a great awe, which has suddenly come over her—she bustles quickly through all her little preparations for the journey, settles with the landlord for her night's lodging, and then, putting on her bonnet, and taking the child in her arms, she sits outside the inn, on a little bench, waiting for the coming of the coach.

But when she is fairly mounted on its top and finds herself whirling away towards Plymouth, and has nothing more to do but to watch for those occasional smiles from the sucking child that at once illumine all Phœbe's atmosphere, however dark at the moment it may happen to be—when she finds,

in a word, action stops, because there is nothing she can do, she also finds that reflection will begin, and that, through reflection, there is a great deal to suffer. It is not easy to follow the painful tangle of her thoughts ; but they may be supposed to run through something like the following course—

Will Mr. Dalrymple know of the death of his lady before she gets home, or will Phœbe herself be the first to make known that additional calamity? But no, she thinks, he must have been warned by the magnitude of the storm, and he would have been sure to have inquired about the fate of the 'Black Gull,' and to have learned all. Or if he had not yet fully satisfied himself, he must be now getting alarmed and be making inquiries. Perhaps he might be in this very neighbourhood now. Perhaps she might meet him before the day was over—nay, during the next hour, or even on the very next vehicle.

Then Phœbe hurriedly began to prepare herself or the questioning she would have to undergo, and she tried to shape out a consistent tale from all her answers.

Scarcely was this theme run through before another rose in its place and began still more painfully to agitate Phœbe. Would the burial of her own child be over before she returned? Did she wish it might be? She could not answer either question at all to her satisfaction. There was a kind of instinctive cunning in Phœbe's nature which told her it would be best for her that all should be over before she reappeared in the village—that is, that Mr. Dalrymple should know of the loss of his wife and have got over the task of burying his supposed child. Phœbe felt it would make a great difference as to her powers of self-control if she found her auditors generally prepared with the knowledge of her calamitous story, and seeking only from her such details as might best harmonize with the expected confirmation. On the other hand, the woman's passionate heart yearned strongly towards her dead babe. She wanted to see it again, even though in death, and surrounded by persons and things that would forbid all display of a mother's emotion. Nay, there was even added to this desire the inconsistent wish to enjoy the spectacle of such a

ceremony, and to solace herself with the secret pride that it was her child who was being thus mourned and honoured.

These reflections disturbed Phœbe more than she liked to acknowledge, and made her half wish, on reaching Plymouth, that she could delay her return till it was certain that Mr. Dalrymple must know all that she desired him to know. But, as she found it would be yet a couple of days, perhaps three, before she could get across the country by the different coaches to her home, which was situated in one of the midland counties of England, she decided to pursue her journey with no further delays than might be advisable to secure the comfort and well-being of the child; and, so determining, she remembered that this must be her wisest plan, as she was bound to recollect that everyone would consider it to be her duty to hurry home in order to be the first to take to Mr. Dalrymple the particulars of his bereavement.

Three days later, a woman, with a babe in her arms, who has been toiling wearily along the road

since the coach set her down at the distance of two or three miles from her destination, stops as she comes to a place where the road divides into two branches. One of these goes apparently towards the thick pine wood, where, gleaming between the trees in the light of the morning sun, which just catches and gilds the windows, appears Branhape Hall; while the other goes winding away through the thick and high hedgerows towards the village of the same name. Though the latter cannot really be seen from the spot where the woman pauses, resting against a bank, she seems to see it well enough, if one may judge by her earnest and protracted gaze in that direction. For some time she remains as if buried in thought, though it is perhaps simply to rest herself, for the child is heavy, and the day sultry, and the woman looks jaded and depressed. But the light and courage in the eye burn fiercely as ever as she turns from the one road to the other, and ponders over the question that they seem to put,—Of the two roads, which? You must commit yourself at last. You are here; you can yet retreat if you will. Go this way to the Hall,

tell the whole story just as it really happened—omitting only certain thoughts and temptations of your own—and you will have no further difficulty. You will even be welcome for his sake who now hangs at your breast. Or, take the other road, steal quietly into the village, and everyone will be glad to see you. No one will doubt it is your own child you bring back. But don't forget that in doing this you must abide by the chosen path: there will be—can be—no safe return hither. You may be met personally by some of the villagers, and, if they do not meet you on the road to the Hall, how will you afterwards explain yourself if you change your secret purpose? Whatever you do, don't at one and the same time give up the child, and yet let your previous intentions be discovered, or even guessed.'

In some such language as this did the two roads seem to appeal to Phœbe's agitated, fervid mind; and terrible once more was the struggle produced in her breast. She felt a strong want of an adviser, forgetting that in guilt there can be no adviser without increase of danger, or defeat of the meditated aim.

Still Phœbe had a sort of adviser, a very innocent one, and yet the very worst that she could have resorted to for aid at such a conjuncture. During these critical days Phœbe always resolved her doubts by taking a long look at the babe; and by reviewing the incidents which that sweet, chubby countenance invariably recalled—a review which generally became dim through tears and which always ended in caresses. And then? Why, then, Phœbe decided, as she decides now, when she hurriedly rises from her half-sitting posture and turns determinedly towards the village.

And once more she begins to recapitulate the many resolves she has previously made with regard to what she is to say, and how she is to evade the remotest danger of exciting doubts as to the truth of her story. Surely, she thinks, and again she tries to impress it as a fact upon herself, all is easy and clear. She has only to abide by the deception which Mrs. Dalrymple and the captain had practised upon Mr. Pample; has only to stick to it that it was the Dalrymples' child that had died and been taken away from the deck of the 'Black Gull,' and there

can be nothing left to excite wonder or difficulty. Of course, Mr. Dalrymple would expect that Phœbe and her babe would return when the former was no longer wanted in her original capacity; and, of course, Phœbe's husband would look at things in the same way. And if *they* were satisfied who else would dare to doubt? As Phœbe almost arrogantly asked herself that question a vision of a certain neighbour flitted across her eyes, and seemed to give her a feeling of inexplicable disquiet. But Susan Beck was such a strange woman! You could never make her out, and yet she seemed to have found the knack of making out everybody else. But while Phœbe was thinking of how she should respectively address herself at the beginning to these very different persons, who made up her world, she became aware of certain sounds that made her stop, intently listening. For some time she could not distinguish anything clearly, and the road took a turn a short way off, so that she could not see far along it. But at last she could hear a muffled tramp as of many feet, not men's only, she fancied, but horses'; and soon she hears wheels. Another

moment of suspense, and, as the wind stirs her hair, it brings with it the sound of a distant bell—tolling solemnly. Yes, evidently, it is the dead child's funeral!

Phœbe seemed at first to be stricken as with sudden paralysis. An inarticulate murmur passed through her white lips, and, scarcely knowing what she was doing, she turned as if to flee. She glanced furtively round, but there was no one in sight; and Phœbe, wondering at that, began to understand that the people were, doubtless, all collected at a certain lodge gate opening into Branhape Park; and which, according to a tradition of the place, was never used except when some one passed from the Hall to the last resting-place in the chancel vault of Branhape Church.

While Phœbe hesitated as to her course she remembered that by turning off into a neighbouring field she could gradually ascend to the high and densely-wooded ground that overlooked the road immediately opposite the lodge on the other side. With her usual impulsiveness, she had no sooner thought of this place than she longed eagerly to be

there in time to see the entire procession. Breathlessly she toiled along with her dear but heavy burden, not forgetting every now and then to look round across the sloping fields for the presence of any solitary labourer who might afterwards speak of her movements. But she saw no one. The funeral had, doubtless, drawn everyone away, either to the lodge, or to the village, or to the churchyard, or to join in the procession.

Was the funeral over, or was the procession only now leaving the Hall? That question again revived for Phœbe the old one, so often put down, yet so persistent in its recurrence. Could she yet arrest all this mistake and avert much of Mr. Dalrymple's grief; or, was her child already lying, after all these worldly honours in the squire's vaults, never again to be disturbed except through her revelations?

She soon reached the spot, and, having made a path with some difficulty through the dense underwood where the brambles above, and the frequently sudden and dangerous descent below, continually warned her that if she did not repress her impatience she and the child might be precipitated headforemost

into the very way of the procession in the sunken road, she at last found herself sitting on a little mossy stone, peering through bushes that allowed her to see all while keeping herself quite unseen.

And now she could hear plainly the procession coming from the Hall along the park road, though it had not yet reached the iron gates. Her child, then, was not buried. And she could also both see and hear the people who were collected in the lane and about the gates. They were chiefly feeble old men, women, and children. No doubt the husbands and grown-up sons had gone to the front of the Hall, or to the church, if they were not indeed following the procession itself. She tried to understand what the people said, but only got confused in the attempt to put together the broken bits of talk that reached her. But she thought one woman was explaining to a deaf old man whom she called father why it was so grand a funeral—that it was like a funeral for the mother as well as the child. Phœbe even fancied that the woman was saying something about a little coffin that was full being placed in one that was empty. Phœbe's heart began also to fill in her

breast, and she thought she should choke. But she must be silent; even a sigh might direct some curious youthful eye and foot towards her secret hiding-place.

At last the head of the melancholy procession appears in the park road, just a little way within the gates; and advances, passes through them, emerges into the high road, and then, under the direction of a busy-looking gentleman in the blackest of black clothes with long weepers streaming from his hat, turns to the left, and moves lugubriously along towards the village and the church. Nothing that the art of the undertaker could do while exercised under a certain sense of Mr. Pample's supervision, who knew his master's tastes too well to permit of any obviously-unnecessary display, was omitted; but whether it was that Phœbe had dwelled so long on the idea of this day's funeral magnificence as to be unable at last to appreciate the less effective reality, or that she did not feel, as the manager of the procession did, the propriety, under the circumstances, of making as little show as was practicable with a family of such rank and

standing, she certainly felt disappointed for a time at what she saw. But when she began to catch a glimpse of the long line of carriages in the rear, then she again felt her bosom swell with a strange mixture of pride and alarm. All this for her child. Really hers!

But now the hearse is passing. Phœbe bends forward, almost drops the babe she carries in an instinctive expansion of her desperate arms to catch the lost one in a last embrace. Inwardly she murmurs, 'Give him back to me as he was, and take your own away. But you cannot! Neither, then, will I spare this. Mine died in your service, yours shall now be mine.'

Yet the true mother's heart wrestles still with the guilty purpose. Every roll of the wheels that takes the hearse farther away seems to appeal to her to stop them. She almost feels as though she could, even now, give up her coveted prize in return for the right to claim her own pale darling, and to weep over him in all the unrestrained luxury of her grief. For the moment she seemed to have no child, living or dead, that was her own.

And now Mr. Dalrymple's carriage comes. Ay, there he is, leaning back, with his noble head just beginning to turn prematurely grey, and still with the same stately bearing that always distinguishes his well-formed and imposing person. Phœbe looks on him, and instinctively tightens her grasp of the child. And yet she wants to go down to him, to throw herself on her knees before him, confess her purpose, and beg his forgiveness. But, even while that impulse is upon her, she sees the array of vehicles following, and she recognizes first one and then another as belonging to the grandest families of the neighbourhood, and she asks herself bitterly—

‘Must I tell the story to them, too? Must I watch them as they begin to discover they have been deceived, and made—as perhaps they may think—ridiculous? Must I see the procession suddenly broken up in disgust and disorder, and hear all these fine gentlefolks, while they tell the drivers to hurry off as fast as they can go, lavish their contempt upon me and on my dead babe? The churchyard will be too good for my boy then,

and the stocks too good for me. No, no—go on; I will keep my own counsel.’

‘Well, in general, it’s the wisest plan, Mrs. Waterman,’ said a voice in Phœbe’s ear.

Trembling with alarm and anger Phœbe turned.

‘Oh, Mrs. Beck, is it you? How you frightened me!’

‘Did I?’ and there was a quiet laugh. ‘Well; and so you’ve got back just in time to see the funeral?’

‘Yes,’ responded Phœbe, turning away her eyes from the searching look of Mrs. Beck, and saying no more.

‘And how are you; and how is your boy? I see you’ve got him there safe.’

‘Oh, he’s quite well, thank ye,’ said Phœbe. And as she spoke thus, she was conscious that if she said no more her last chance of safety in avowal of the truth was gone. She looked at Mrs. Beck, and Mrs. Beck looked at her, and a sort of proud, defiant courage seemed to keep Phœbe to her purpose. *She was silent.*

Yes, Phœbe saw the crisis, accepted it, and was

silent. The babe thenceforward was to be hers beyond question or remedy. She was committed at last. To give him up now would be, not only to lose him, but to make herself infamous in all eyes as the woman who had tried to rob a father of his only child; and at a time, too, when he demanded all possible sympathy and support.

CHAPTER X.

SUSAN BECK AND HER LITTLE DAUGHTER.

THE woman whose unexpected presence so startled Phœbe was about forty years of age, of a composed, not to say reserved, countenance, and with a curiously-bright and inquisitive-looking eye. She had good features, and might have been a comely woman but that her face was spoiled by two things—a long sharp tooth projecting over her bottom lip, and a complexion of almost deathly whiteness, which was not relieved by any kind of colour in her hair or dress. That hair of Susan's was a kind of pale drab; and her dresses were generally much the same, for as the gossips of Branhape said, 'Susan raily did wash 'em and turn 'em, and turn 'em and wash 'em, till there wasn't a rag left to throw at a beggar.'

But for the strange grey eye you might have

supposed her one of that large class of women who are, as the poet says, without character ; but meeting the gaze of that penetrating yet impenetrable grey eye, you could not draw any such conclusion, even though you found it impossible to guess what kind of character lay behind it. And as with her face so with her history. Up to the years of womanhood no one ever spoke of Susan as exhibiting any quality at all remarkable, unless, indeed, it were that her very noiseless way of moving through life itself called forth at times a comment. Thus, when a gossip once remarked to a circle of tea-drinkers, who were discussing Susan with all the freedom and zest peculiar to such occasions, that, for her part, all she should say was—that ‘still waters run deep’—there was a wonderful concurrence of opinion as to the happy hit made by the speaker. But there came a time when the gossips found a still more piquant theme for talk. A rumour got abroad—the truth of which no one could either affirm or contradict—of a proceeding upon Susan’s part that aroused in the highest degree the curiosity and interest of the neighbour-

hood. It began to be whispered about that Susan, who had a lover, a young farmer in the neighbourhood, had suddenly found the gentleman less anxious about the marriage ceremony than was desirable alike for Susan's sake and for the general moral repute of the place. But Susan, it seems, was not the woman to let a commonplace story of seduction end also in a commonplace marriage of the seducer with somebody else, as the young farmer had proposed; hoping, perhaps, thus to teach Susan she had better hold her tongue and trouble him no more. But one evening, so the story went (for no one was able to state with certainty how much was true or how much false), when the wandering lover was sitting closely over his winter-evening fire and arranging with his mother all the details of his intended marriage with Susan's rival, there came a knock at the door, which the farmer himself answered, and found himself face to face with the deserted fair one. What happened in the long interview between the two, or in that which subsequently took place between them and the mother, no one pretends to know; but this is certain, Susan

never again quitted the farm till she went forth to be married some weeks later, and to return as mistress of the place.

But, though Susan thus triumphed over all opposition and cleared her good name from reproach, she never showed the least sign of triumph or change in her demeanour, which remained as quiet and secretive as ever. The general belief was that she had frightened the farmer out of his wits during that long talk at the door; but as he would never say anything, and as Susan herself offered no explanations, the village gossips were brought to a standstill, and so the affair ended by a general acquiescence in the conclusion that Susan was 'oncommon clever,' and with many a laugh at the hapless husband's expense. As for him, poor fellow, he never was again the same man as before! Things went badly. The farm failed, and he would have sunk into destitution but for Susan's inventive industry. Nobody cared to say—for no one was able to think—that Susan proved herself exactly a good wife; but it is certain she kept their home comfortable until the

husband's death, and then she buried him handsomely.

And how did she accomplish all this? Why that, again, was a puzzling question for the cottagers' wives to answer, though not really a difficult one. Susan was, in fact, so clever as to be always in request. If a housekeeper or a lady's-maid in the neighbourhood wanted a holiday, or ran off suddenly, or died, Susan Beck was sure to be sent for to fill the vacant place for the time. If a grand feast were given Susan's services were always in requisition; she could assist the cook with the choicest pastry, run through the rooms and plan and execute alterations and additional accommodations with the housekeeper, go off to the neighbouring town to execute delicate commissions in costume for the mistress, or sit down with the young ladies, and their maid if they had one, to prepare new dresses in some incredibly short space of time. But even these numerous avocations do not include Susan Beck's most profitable way of employing her time and talent. She was perfectly invaluable as a nurse when additions were being made to some one or

other of the genteel families in the neighbourhood, and Susan would only attend to such customers. So, again, if a rich old lady dropping into the last stage of imbecility wanted to be nursed for a few weeks quietly into the grave, Susan was the very woman for the work. She was so patient and careful, and always so very 'clever.' She came into a legacy of 20*l.* a year in 'grateful remembrance,' says the will, 'of her care of the Dowager Lady Tholmondeley,' for a month or two thus profitably spent.

Yet, though thus made use of, and enjoying a certain amount of deference that looked like respect, Susan Beck had no friend, no associate, with the single exception of Phœbe Waterman. The tie between the two women arose thus: Susan was a capital listener, and Phœbe loved to talk. And if, through this qualification, Susan got at a great many secrets, people became accustomed to the fact and did not mind it, for Susan always kept her discoveries to herself. On the other hand, Phœbe, who since her marriage had had a strange hankering after children, and had not given birth

to any of her own until recently, used to nurse and fondle Mrs. Beck's only child, Susanna ; and, what was of great importance to Susan, whenever the latter wanted to be away from home for a few weeks, Phœbe was always glad to have Susanna left in her custody. Whatever vices Phœbe might have, she was not mercenary. Mrs. Beck found this kind of intimacy so convenient, that she came to live next door to Phœbe ; and thus the friendship of the two women—if friendship it might be called—grew into something like strength.

Such was Susan Beck, Phœbe's neighbour and friend, the woman who broke thus unexpectedly upon the latter in the midst of her secret and agitating reflections, and who had heard her utter the words, 'I will keep my own counsel.'

The two women sat for a time in silence, both apparently engaged in looking after the procession and dwelling on the thoughts naturally excited by it. But, in truth, Phœbe was already trying to remember the exact words she had used when overheard by Mrs. Beck, and planning how to explain

them away. But she knew by experience it was of little use to say anything to Susan that you wished her to believe, unless palpable and accompanying facts made belief of the statement unavoidable. Besides, she had a queer habit of listening and holding her tongue in answer. Whether she was or was not convinced seemed to Susan a matter of such indifference that you could scarcely expect her to declare the result for the benefit or comfort of other people. Phœbe, therefore, felt instinctively that the best way in all difficult cases was to pay Susan back in her own coin by silence on dangerous themes.

‘What brought you here?’ inquired Phœbe, as she turned, with almost a martyr’s courage, to face Mrs. Beck’s gaze.

‘I might ask you the same question,’ was the reply.

‘Oh! I didn’t want anybody to see me and make a fuss while the funeral was going on—that’s all. Besides, it’s a dreadful thing, you know, to have to meet the squire and tell him I saw the last of his lady; so I’m trying to get up a bit of courage first.’

‘Well, and I was at the old work—herb-gathering,’ said Mrs. Beck, taking some green leaves and stems from a little bag-shaped basket of straw that hung upon her arm.

Mrs. Beck was famous for her skill in the decoction of simples, as well as for the uses she put them to. Wonderful cures were reported of which she had been the author; and, although none of these were probably so well authenticated as to be deemed deserving of study by the members of the College of Physicians, two facts were quite clear—Susan’s patients were full of faith, and no one of them had ever been known to come to any injury through her medicines. Susan Beck was much too clever a woman to risk anything of that kind.

When the last of the people who followed the procession on foot had disappeared at the turn of the road, Phœbe rose, saying—

‘Ah, well, I’m glad I got back in time to see the end of my poor mistress’s babe. You needn’t wonder, Susan, that I who suckled him from the very hour of his birth should feel almost like a mother to him.’

‘Ah, poor babe!’ rejoined Susan, ‘he was a fine boy. But, bless me, how he had fallen away! I laid him out, and prepared his linen, and put him in the coffin, and saw the last of his face before they put on the lid. Would you believe it, I shouldn’t ha’ knowed him, he’d got so thin and altered like?’

‘Yes,’ said Phœbe, not trusting herself to meet Mrs. Beck’s face ‘he was very thin when he died.’

‘How did he die?’

‘I fancy of cold.’

‘Through the exposure in travelling, I daresay?’

‘Yes,’ said Phoebe.

And after this there was silence while they walked on through the fields skirting the road and gradually descending towards the village. Susan was the first to speak.

‘It must have been a tiresome job for you. I hope you’re well paid.’

‘She gave me more than I expected.’

‘Ah, I like to serve such ladies, though ’tisn’t easy to put me in that position,’ remarked Susan, with a laugh.

Phœbe thought to herself—‘She wants to know now if I havn’t got plenty of things—valuables—out of the affair: she would.’ But, as she said nothing to Susan, the latter observed—

‘Poor lady! what a many things must ha’ been lost with her if no one was by to look after em’—pocket-book with bank-notes, jewels, watches—all gone, I suppose?’

‘Yes,’ said Phoebe, with something like impatience, that might even have seemed to be disgust, but that she kept herself under restraint.

By this time the two had reached a stile; and, crossing it, they were in the village, which appeared to be empty of all but a few children. Something in the voice or manner of one of these attracted Mrs. Beck, who called out at the top of her voice,

‘Susanna, come here directly.’

Susanna came, and was followed by a group of other children, who were pelting her till they saw her mother, and who then contented themselves with abuse. The child, getting behind her mother’s skirts, stood looking out at them mockingly, and

with her right hand bent ready, like a kitten's paw, to scratch, if she saw occasion.

She was very young, certainly not more than four years old, but looked much older, in spite of her beauty and excessive fairness of complexion. Her cheeks were just touched with a pink tinge. Her eyes were bright blue, and but for a certain slyness might have been called attractive. Her hair was so very light that in her eyebrows and eyelashes colour seemed to disappear altogether, and to have left them at once white and almost imperceptible. She had thin lips, and you might have thought them inexpressive if you saw them at rest, but not when curled with scorn or puffed out with a mocking defiance, as they now appear, while she looks out on her late playmates from the protection of her mother's dress. She wears a snow-white frock, and has a black sash round her waist. Her sleeves are also looped up with black ribbon.

‘Do be quiet, and let the children alone!’ exclaimed Mrs. Beck, giving her daughter a slight shake, but with much the same kind of enjoyment

that most of us feel in repressing the vagaries of a frolicsome kitten.

‘What’s the black sash and ribbon for?’ asked Phœbe, not that she really was at a loss to know, but that some inner feeling made her wish to hear the answer.

‘Oh! for the heir of Branhape, of course,’ replied Susan, who rather prided herself on a sort of backstair influence with the gentry. ‘How would it ha’ looked for me to take no notice that has a child of my own!’

Phœbe said nothing, but stooped down to kiss the little creature, who first stood aloof and then coquetishly sprung so violently upon her neck as to render it difficult for Phœbe to keep herself and the babe from falling.

‘There, there!’ exclaimed Phœbe, laughing, ‘that’ll do. Now, look here. You must love my little boy, and help me to nurse him. You will, won’t you?’

Susanna took a long look at the babe as Phœbe remained crouched low on the ground, and then, looking sily up at Phœbe and her mother, she said, tossing her head,

‘I shall make him love me;’ and then ran off to seek her late playmates.

The women laughed, and seemed greatly to enjoy the joke.

‘She’s an odd girl,’ presently said Phœbe.

‘Isn’t she now?’ answered Susan, looking after the child admiringly. And then, after a pause, she continued—

‘They tell me that they don’t know what to do with her at school. If one of the children gives her a poke with the elbow, or slaps her, or anything of that kind, she’ll seem to take no notice of it at the time, but a little after the mistress’ll hear a scream, and, when all the hubbub’s made clear, it’ll turn out that Miss Susanna has bent her head down to the shoulder or arm of the one who has offended her and took up a bit o’ flesh in them little sharp teeth of hers and bit it nearly through. Sometimes it’s her nails: I never see such a child with her nails as Susy!’ And Mrs. Beck laughed, as if greatly relishing her daughter’s precocious peccadilloes.

‘It would be funny though, wouldn’t it,’ she

added, 'if Susy keeps her word, and makes your boy fall in love with her some day?'

'Very!' replied Phœbe; but didn't seem to care to carry the conversation any further; and so they reached home.

CHAPTER XI.

PHŒBE WATERMAN'S HOME.

BRANHAPE was looking very bright and busy, as it always did look on a fine summer's morning. It was very hot truly, but the brawny blacksmith hammering away in a shower of sparks in his black shed under the elms, and the workmen in Pringle's, the carpenter's great yard, and the men who were carting clover in the meadows, all felt it would be hotter by-and-by; when half-an-hour's doze under the park trees or in the cool sanded parlour of the Dalrymple Arms would be even more acceptable than now, and that there was no time for work like the present.

So the hammering and the sawing, and all the usual sounds of labour, greeted Phœbe as she once again stood at her own door.

It was a very small and humble-looking door;

and the cottage was so low, that the window of Phœbe's bed-room over the kitchen could almost be reached from the village street. A neglected vine had slid from its fastenings on the gabled roof, with its single attic window, and lay curled in a thick mass between Phœbe's bed-room window and the door below, sending out long shoots in all directions.

Phœbe put one aside with an impatient exclamation which sounded to Mrs. Beck very like 'laziness!' and then lifting the latch she went in, followed by Susan.

The door opened into a room which served them as parlour and kitchen, and which had another door (now standing open), that led into a good-sized piece of garden, crammed with flowers, vegetables, and fruit trees, but utterly neglected; and the sight of it called forth another impatient exclamation from Phœbe.

The room they were in was long and low, and when the garden door was shut, was lighted only by a miserable little latticed window, which Stephen Waterman darkened by obstinately keeping on its sill a gigantic fan-shaped geranium that had been

bequeathed to him by his father when he died, and which Stephen treasured as a precious heirloom.

Somehow, in spite of all the attempts at smartness Phœbe had made in it, the room would, as she said, look 'poverty struck.' Yet it contained better things than most of the cottages at Branhape. There was one of the brightest little oaken corner cupboards in the world, with glass doors revealing the gayest crockery; and there was an oaken settle and drawers, all of Stephen's own workmanship.

The meadow-sweet and dog-roses which Phœbe had placed in a jar in the empty grate, just before she got Mrs. Dalrymple's letter, were dead; and the little boxwood crucifix hanging over the mantelpiece was covered with dust. So was the swing bookshelf, containing some books of poetry and plays which Mrs. Dalrymple had given to Phœbe, and Stephen's great Bible, an ancestral gift like the geranium.

Of the other three rooms, one was Phœbe's bedroom, a second a kind of store-place on the same landing, in which generally stood a sack of potatoes, a wooden tray of apples, bunches of dried herbs,

and little pet logs of wood which Phœbe kept there that she might have one always ready for her fire when she wanted it without having to beg and pray Stephen, 'who made such a fuss about his wood.' The third room was in the roof—a long sloping room, with rickety boards, and low splintery beams to knock your head against everywhere you turned. It had no furniture except a couple of tables maimed in the legs, and a few broken-backed chairs. Yet this was the room in which, in after-years, the dream was dreamt, and the plan matured, which was to bring upon that little child at Phœbe's breast the great misery of his life.

Phœbe called up the narrow staircase—

'Stephen! Stephen!' Receiving no answer, she went to the door and looked across the sweetbriar hedge at the bottom of the garden, where at some distance in the field stood Stephen's workshop.

'I suppose he's there muddling,' she said to Susan; 'I'll go across the field to him.'

'But you're tired, sure, give me the boy till you come back.'

'O yes!' sighed Phœbe, as though she then first.

felt how truly fatigued she was, 'I shall be so glad to be relieved of him.' But she had scarcely set him on Susan's knee when she flushed and snatched him up again, saying hastily,

'No, I'll take him with me.'

'Just as you like,' coldly replied Susan.

Again the eyes met, but Phœbe was prepared, and so, with a half-laugh, she remarked,

'What d'ye think Stephen 'd say to me if I came back without his boy?'

Susan heard, and looked so impressed with the truth, that Phœbe began to discover a new and unintended meaning in her words. She, however, quietly added—

'I wish, Susan, you'd stay with us to-day, and get us up a nice bit of supper. I shall want something after seeing the squire; and I hope we may enjoy ourselves then, all together.'

Susan showed as much pleasure at this idea as she ever did show at anything; and Phœbe, glad to have made so successful a diversion, hurried off with the infant towards the workshop, murmuring inly to herself,

‘What did she want with him? I’m certain, by the look of her eye, she had something in view. Perhaps to strip him and look over his body. Does she know of any mark, I wonder, that can have escaped me? Not very likely, I think.’ So ruminated Phœbe, and evidently was altogether put terribly out of sorts by this inconvenient proximity of her friend. Suddenly she stopped, with an exclamation—

‘My God! I do not feel the package. Oh, what a fool I am! Here it is, safe enough. I must dispose of it somewhere to-night.’

The package was that which had been entrusted to Phœbe by Mrs. Dalrymple when they parted on the deck of the ‘Black Gull,’ the unfortunate wife’s last gift to her husband.

Phœbe did not go by the little footpath that went curving from the sweetbriar hedge to the workshop, but went straight across, leaving a trail behind her in the long grass, sunny with buttercups and red with sorrel; and Susan Beck stood at the garden door watching her.

Stephen’s workshop had been built by himself, and

was the only thing he had ever attempted in the building line that had turned out a credit to him. It was a low three-cornered kind of shed, fitted rudely to the shape of the natural rock foundation, with a wide heavy-framed window, a thatched roof, and a well-tarred door. Not a very fine building to look at, but one which was reported by certain blackguards of Branhape, who perhaps had good reasons for knowing, to be of marvellous strength; and when such reports reached Stephen, he winked and looked very wise, and 'rather believed it *was* strong; he'd like to see a thicker wall in twelve parishes round; it was rough, but he rather did believe it was strong.'

It was rough; inside it was particularly rough. All over the walls stuck out bits of wood and brick, which Stephen had used to fill up apertures left by his defective building. One part of it was white-washed, one part was tarred, and the other parts were left for further consideration.

The sunshine was full upon it as Phœbe stood at the door.

Stephen was there in his apron and brown-paper cap 'muddling,' as Phœbe said, over a gigantic tea-

caddy of a most quaint and curious design; his unfailing resource when out of work, and therefore Phœbe detested the sight of it.

‘Poor fellow, he looks as if he hadn’t got his meals regular since I have been gone,’ thought Phœbe; and certainly, poor Stephen did not look as if his bodily welfare had been much attended to, for his face was very thin and woe-begone. For the rest he was a narrow-shouldered small man, with small head and slow, thoughtful, but not intelligent eyes.

Those eyes were now gazing down at the tea-caddy in some perplexity; and Stephen was lifting his paper cap a little on one side while giving his head a gentle contemplative scratch, when Phœbe slid silently in and dealt him a rousing slap on the back, which made him shout with alarm. But when he saw who it was, and heard her riotous mirth, for somehow Phœbe had either regained her old spirits or manufactured some new ones to a very respectable semblance of them, he, too, began to laugh, as he exclaimed—

‘Is it really you?’

‘Ay, old man, it’s me. Ain’t you going to give

me a kiss after all this time? Perhaps you wish it was me who had been drowned and our little boy who had died?’

Stephen did kiss his wife, but not until he had first kissed the baby and taken a long look at him.

‘Why, bless me, Phœbe, I don’t think voyaging has done him any good. He don’t look a bit like the same.’

‘Do I look the same, I wonder?’

‘Well, now you ask me, I must say you don’t. But no wonder. Ugh! you’ve had a hardish time on it, I suppose? ’Tain’t easy work waiting on the gentlefolk. Well, I bin a fidgetin’ about you both above a bit. Phœbe, lass, if aught had befell you or the boy it ’ud a gone hard with me, God knows it would.’

Phœbe couldn’t answer that. Stephen spoke feelingly, and the woman’s heart was touched. A tear stole down her cheek.

‘How was it you didn’t go to the funeral?’ asked Phœbe.

‘Oh, I was busy. Besides, what’s the use of making such a fuss about a baby of that age?’

‘Oh! don’t say that; don’t, Stephen; it’s wicked. Think if it were your own.’ Phœbe spoke with terrible earnestness.

‘Ah, well, I didn’t think much about the matter, I suppose. No, I shouldn’t like it to ha’ bin our little chap,’ added Stephen, looking fondly on the boy, who gazed up in his face with eyes of wonder that seemed to keep growing larger and larger.

‘Here, take the boy,’ said she.

Stephen did so, and perhaps a little awkwardly, as having got out of practice for the last two or three weeks, so the child began to cry. Phœbe tried to sooth it while rummaging in her pockets. Presently she took out a purse and gave it to Stephen.

‘There,’ said she, ‘you’ll find I have not lost my time.’

‘How much?’ inquired Stephen.

‘Why, there’s a deal altogether, but part of it don’t exactly belong to me. She gave me twenty pounds, and the rest of the hundred was to be put by for this little rogue’s better bringing up.’

Stephen really loved his boy, but somehow felt a

great increase of affection just then for the child in spite of his persistent cries. He was ever haunted by a sense of future poverty. He could bear well enough any difficulty while he was actually face to face with it, but lived always in a nervous dread of the to-morrow. What would become of his wife and child if he were to fall ill, or if he were to find work still harder to get, or if he could make no provision for old age? These were the fears that took the manliness out of Stephen Waterman on so many occasions, in spite of his other good qualities, such as his dogged industry and his love of home.

The sight of the purse therefore greatly moved him. 'Well,' said he, 'when I look again at him I do think he's improved.'

Cries of 'Mrs. Waterman! Mrs. Waterman!' now interrupted them, and Phœbe went out to see who it was. Susan stood there half-way between the village and the workshop. As soon as she saw them she called out, 'Here's a man from the squire waiting for you with a carriage! He knows you are at home, and wants you to go to him directly at the Hall.'

‘Ay,’ thought Phœbe to herself, ‘now comes my hardest trial. Coming, Susan! say I’m coming directly.’

Susan Beck went back to the house, and Phœbe returned to the shed for the child. Having told her husband of the message, she said—

‘Now, Stephen, you just run and put that money away where no one can by any chance get to see it, while I follow with the boy. Mind Mrs. Beck’s eyes.’

Stephen, accustomed to obedience, and quite convinced of the prudence of the suggestion, went off to the house. He had scarcely got outside the shed before Phœbe hurriedly drew Mrs. Dalrymple’s packet from her pocket, saying—

‘I must hide this somewhere till night. Not for worlds could I go into his presence with this about me.’

She looked round, and put it first in one place, then another, and appeared still dissatisfied.

‘Oh, it’s useless troubling now. If I can but keep it safe till night, I’ll come again when everybody’s abed. Under the shavings, where he can’t easily get at it by any accident? Yes, that will do.’

Stooping on the floor, and stretching her arm to its utmost reach under Stephen's heavy and solid bench, which left only a few inches of space between itself and the ground, she pushed it so far that she could at last only touch it with her finger-tips. Another minute and she had snatched up the child from a bed of shavings, locked the door, and was fast moving over the field towards the house in front of which waited Mr. Dalrymple's messenger.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW GUY OBTAINED HIS NAME.

MANY of the neighbours had by this time returned from seeing the funeral, and began to collect about Phœbe's cottage, when they observed the carriage at the door, and to relate to one another the news that Phœbe had returned.

She, however, hardly noticed them, but got into the carriage with her child, forgetting even the presence of Susan Beck, and saying nothing to her husband in answer as he observed to her,

‘Make haste back, and we’ll have a nice supper ready for you.’

She was now absorbed in the thought of meeting Mr. Dalrymple, and fortifying herself with the reflection it would soon be over and all her difficulties ended.

Rapidly the carriage whirled along. Phœbe

looked out from time to time, but felt as though she saw nothing. Her tongue grew dry, her lips hot, and at times she fancied she would be unable to speak without some guilty display. They passed the lodge where she had seen the funeral procession, passed the little bridge over the brook, came to the other and principal lodge, went winding about among the thick plantations and along the exquisitely white and smooth gravel road, came to another and magnificent stone bridge across the broad, ornamental water, where a couple of swans were sailing lovingly along, turning their heads and necks so prettily towards each other that even Phœbe was struck by the grace and sweetness of their gestures, and thought of the babes she had so lately nursed together, and then in another minute she was on the broad terrace before the entrance-porch of Branhape Hall—a fine old Elizabethan pile, with an immense stretch of glass all over its front, as if the entire façade were but in a sense one magnificent window, that lighted the whole interior.

A servant who had been watching the arrival let down the steps, and handed Phœbe out, and saying,

‘This way,’ led her through the little vestibule across the magnificent hall, with antique suits of armour against the walls, to a small room occasionally occupied by Mr. Dalrymple as a private study when he was wearied of the state and elaborateness of preparation that characterized the superb library.

The room was empty when she entered it, at least to anyone but Phœbe it would have seemed so, but she could scarcely repress an exclamation when she found herself face to face with her kind, confiding, and unfortunate mistress. It so happened that Phœbe had never been in this room, never seen this picture : which, indeed, was not to be wondered at, for it had been only painted when the talk first arose about Mrs. Dalrymple going abroad, and had only arrived at the Hall since the departure of the original.

The likeness was only too good for Phœbe ; she stood spell-bound before it ; and, as she gazed upon the exceedingly sweet, yet sad and tender face, a reproach seemed to be gathering in the eyes, and upon the almost moving lips, that Phœbe felt was

almost maddening lie. The babe, too, attracted perhaps by a glitter on the corner of the massive gold frame, gave a sudden smile and stretched out its tiny hands, and for a moment Phœbe felt overpowered with what seemed a general conspiracy of natural things against her. But a new thought drove off this. She began to feel almost angry with the child, and to caress it in a kind of demanding spirit and manner, as though she said,

‘You shall love me; you shall! I have paid dearly for you, and will not let you go.’

Then, resolutely turning her back on the portrait, she sat down to wait for Mr. Dalrymple’s coming, who did not keep her long in suspense, but almost immediately entered the room.

Mr. Dalrymple was, as we have intimated, a man of noble presence, though the effect was impaired by a certain stoop of the shoulders. He looked about sixty. Phœbe was instantly struck by the great change in him since she had been away. He stooped more than she had ever known him to do before; there was a certain indecision in his step and gait and eye quite foreign to his vigorous but serene

nature; and the face, once so cheerful and full of genial pleasantry, seemed to be darkened by long years of gloom.

‘Sit down, sit down,’ he said, as Phœbe rose and curtsied on his entrance. ‘It was a thoughtless thing of them to bring you here;’ and he half looked towards the picture. It was characteristic of him that he did not say, ‘to bring *me* here;’ though, no doubt, he felt the mistake more than he could suppose Phœbe would.

‘Perhaps, sir, you would like us to go to another room?’ inquired Phœbe, and moved towards the door, without waiting for his answer.

‘No, no! sit down. In one word, Phœbe, do you know anything about—’ The deep voice trembled and died.

Phœbe sighed heavily as she answered, ‘Yes, sir.’

‘Speak, then, and fear not, for I have no hope.’

Moistening her dry lips, and managing to get her face into shade, and only venturing now and then to look at Mr. Dalrymple, Phœbe tried to speak, but her tongue refused her utterance, and she began to tremble with affright lest she had overrated her own

strength to take her safely through the terrible ordeal. But again her fertile ingenuity saved her. She remembered Mrs. Dalrymple's letter, the one which led to her departure. She took it from her pocket and handed it in breathless silence.

He read it; and she could see the paper quivering as he held it up so as partly to shield his face from Phœbe's eye as he made himself master of the contents. There was a long pause when he had done. Then he said,

‘Yes; I cannot blame you, after reading this. Well?’

Phœbe again essayed to speak, and though her first accents came falteringly, and were every now and then interrupted by tears and sobs, which were true in themselves, but which Phœbe's instinctive cunning rather encouraged than kept down, she began to tell him how she had gone, as requested, to Plymouth, taking with her a woman—

‘Does she live?’

‘No, sir.’

—Taking with her a woman to nurse her own (Phœbe's) boy; how she had met Mrs. Dalrymple at

Plymouth—how they had gone on board the ‘Black Gull’—been becalmed so many days—

‘Oh, I might have saved her, then, had I gone after her, as I at first intended! Well, well, well!’

He bent his head in anguish, but Phœbe went on—

—How the child had begun to sicken on board ship, and at last died, as they all believed, of fever through cold—

‘Through exposure, no doubt. God help me!—that anyone should have thought to take a babe of a month old on such an expedition! Well?’

—How Mr. Pample had interrupted them just when they were about to bury the child—

‘Yes, I know; go on.’

—How after that Phœbe had wished to get home with her boy; how she had been put on board the boat to go to the ‘Marco Polo;’ been wrecked and saved; and how, next day, she had seen the ‘Black Gull’ drift in and break to pieces, and her mistress disappear with the last portion of the hull that had for a time remained on the rock.

Mr. Dalrymple listened in silence to all these cruel details, his elbows at first resting upon the

table, and his upright arms supporting his head, as he looked now at Phœbe, now at the floor ; but gradually the arms dropped, and the head bowed down, and the strong man gave way, even audibly, to a grief such as he had never known before, and such as Phœbe had not even dreamed of.

From time to time, as she gazed on him, she felt as though some one knocked upon her breast, and cried loudly to her, ‘ Can you bear this ? Will you not yet shed a ray of light and hope upon this desolate head ? Will you, can you rob this father of his child ; this family, whose line and history have become entwined with the dearest interest and associations of the neighbourhood, of its natural heir ? ’ But then she had now a resource. Perhaps she was not conscious of it as a resource ; but it was one, and she made use of it. The very reasons that made it so terrible for her to keep the child made it still more terrible for her to give him back and acknowledge that she had been so infamous as to plot to steal him away. Phœbe was able even to think harshly of her own act, when thinking so strength-

ened her purpose ; the idea that she could not undo what she had done now settled all.

‘ And did my wife never—did she ? ’—Mr. Dalrymple seemed to find it impossible to put his question into words, but Phœbe understood him well enough. She had good reasons for understanding, for this was the question she had always most dreaded.

‘ O yes, she did indeed, sir. She repented bitterly of the whole affair, and would have sent the child back with me—if it had lived.’

‘ Mrs. Dalrymple said this ? ’

‘ Oh, she did indeed and indeed, sir ; and she cried as she said it, and she meant to have written to you.’

‘ But you have no letter ? ’

‘ No, sir.’

‘ Nor anything from her ? Nothing saved ? ’

‘ Nothing but her purse, which she gave me with a hundred pounds in it—twenty for going with her, and the rest she wished me to put by for my boy’s education.’

‘ Could you spare that purse to me ? ’

‘ Oh, sir, I will send it up to you to-night. I have

given it to my husband in order to put the money safely away.'

There was another pause, during which Mr. Dalrymple seemed to be quietly mastering his agitation. At last he came close to Phœbe, and said,

'And your boy—is he well and safe?' Again the bitter expression passed over the father's face as he thought of his own child.

'Yes, sir,' replied Phœbe; and she opened her shawl and laid the babe across her knees to let Mr. Dalrymple look at him.

As it had so happened that the father had not seen the boy many times since his birth—only, indeed, when he had ridden over from time to time to Phœbe's house to satisfy himself and wife that the babe was thriving—it was no wonder he could not now recognize him, though it was his own flesh and blood that lay there before him, in all the sweet sleep of infancy. And yet a something seemed to be stirring unconsciously in his heart, for once he looked from the babe's face to that of Mrs. Dalrymple's portrait, as though a subtle link of association had been awakened; but, whatever it might be, he thought no

more of it, nor suspected for an instant it was other than Phœbe Waterman's child he gazed upon.

'I suppose,' he said, touching with his finger the closed baby's fist, which immediately opened, received, and held the finger fast, 'I suppose my wife was attached to this little fellow?'

'O yes; she said once she loved it almost as if it were her own. You see, sir,' added Phœbe hastily, as though fearing he might be offended at the familiarity it implied, 'she knew how much I loved her child.'

'And what is his name?' asked Mr. Dalrymple.

'He's not christened yet, sir.'

'Would you like me to be his godfather?'

Phœbe's face brightened as with a sudden flash; her colour rose; but she felt so overpowered that she could only say, as she curtsied, 'Oh, sir!'

'And may I give him his name?'

Phœbe's face again answered for her.

'Well, call him Guy; it is an old and favourite name with us. I meant my own to have borne it; but, as it is, our line will now end with me, and we shall never again have any use for it.'

So saying he stooped and kissed the baby while extricating his finger from the chubby fist ; and then he took from his neck a chain and watch, both of gold, and costly, and hung the chain round the child's neck, and said,

‘Take care of that for him—it is his godfather's gift. Train him well. Make him an honest and industrious man, and while I live he and you may always look for a friend in me.’

He then poured out some wine, made Phœbe drink, saw her with courtly grace to the door, ordered the servant to have her driven back, and then returned to a terrible communion with that picture, and all the grief and disappointment, and occasional bitterness and tender and passionate affection, it called forth.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN INNOCENT IMPOSTOR LYING IN STATE.

WHILE Phœbe retraced in the carriage the way she had come, and took the watch and chain from the child's neck and put them about her own, so that she might carry them with greater safety, and while she drew her shawl carefully over the gleaming links, so that no casual eyes might see her babe's treasure, she began to measure thoughtfully the results of her late interview, and to draw from it assurances of complete success. Still she had much to do. She felt uneasy so long as the packet lay under the bench in the workshop containing the evidences of her deception; she wished its safety had been better provided for; and she did not feel altogether satisfied that the workshop was the best place of concealment available, even if she had had time to dispose of it properly there. At times

she asked herself, 'Hadn't she better destroy the packet?' But no; Phœbe couldn't do that. Her crime had reached its natural boundary, and she had no temptation to go beyond. The love for the child, unscrupulous and unlawful as it was, still was love; and it forbade any injury to his future prospects that seemed to Phœbe at all avoidable. She did not even really shut out a vague notion that, somehow or other, at some time or other, the boy would regain his true position, and all parties (herself included) be made comfortable. It was this belief that modified to her own mind the true character of her deed; and she encouraged the belief in order that she might be able to think as well of herself and her motives as the circumstances admitted. Still she was uneasy whenever she thought of the packet, and her hand kept wandering towards the place where it had been with a frequent sense of alarm at not finding it there, for she had become accustomed to satisfy herself of its safety between every pause in her troubled fancies; and often, indeed, when she was herself unconscious of the gesture. No, she thought

and said to herself, she could not enjoy the supper and the chat with the neighbours till that packet was safely stowed away where no earthly eye could discover it.

And then she had another pressing desire at her heart—namely, to visit the grave of her own true child. She had half intended to ask Mr. Dalrymple's permission, but had been afraid that something in her voice or manner in making the request might have suggested the dangerous question—'Why should she care so much about my boy?' Of course, she had replied to herself, as if replying to him, 'Did I not nurse him—suckle him—was not the very life in him part of my life?' But still she had judged it wiser to hold her tongue, and had therefore quitted the Hall without saying anything of her intention.

But Phœbe was a wilful personage in all matters that she really did care about; and she had vowed to herself, while looking secretly on at the funeral, that if she could not then assert her right to be a mourner, she would yet manage to see her child's last resting-place, and give vent to the natural grief

of a mother. But how? That question she now asked herself as the carriage rolled along, and she was not long in finding an answer. Pulling the check-string of the carriage, as soon as they had passed from the park road into the high road, she begged the driver to put her down, not at her own house, but near the church and the place where the sexton lived. She said to the man in explanation,

‘I was just too late to-day to see the funeral and to get to the church, but I ought, you know, to see the place where they buried him. He died in my arms.’

‘I doubt if ye’re in time,’ was the man’s answer. ‘The squire’s vault is i’ the chancel o’ the church, and they have allers to open the pavement to get down to the spot. But maybe the sexton won’t ha’ replaced the flagstones yet. And there he is! Ay, he’s just going back from his house to the church. He’s been to his tea, most like; Joshua likes his tea. And for that matter, I don’t suppose Joshua ever missed a meal on account o’ a funeral sin’ he came to the place. I often say to him he seems to enjoy his food best at such times. Natural enough!

It's his business. Of course a morsel eats sweeter when one sees more comfortably than usual how it's to be paid for. So I says, and sticks to it, Joshua's right enough.'

Phœbe said nothing in answer, but got out quietly as the vehicle stopped at the sexton's house, and gave the man a crown piece, to his great surprise and satisfaction, which were indeed so apparent that Phœbe thought it best to say,

'The squire's been so good and generous to me that you needn't mind taking it.'

'Well, Mrs. Waterman, I'm sure I thank you very kindly.' He touched his horses with the whip, and away they went.

Phœbe stepped quickly into the cottage, and found there the sexton's wife busily ironing her husband's Sunday shirt, for he officiated as pew-opener in the sacred edifice. She stared at Phœbe, who looked wild and agitated, but welcomed her back, and proffered her a seat.

'No, thank ye, Mrs. Darkley, I came in to see if you'd take care of my boy for a few minutes while I go into the church. I should like to see where

they've put the squire's baby. I only returned to-day while the funeral was going on.'

'To be sure I will. But won't you have something? I'll make you a fresh cup of tea in a minute, and I've a nice hot cake in the oven, for I'm expecting Susan Beck to tea presently—only my husband wouldn't wait for her.'

'Susan Beck?'

'Yes; she sent a little boy just now to say she should come up and have a little bit of gossip with me this evening. She often does.'

Phœbe had half a mind to take the child out of the cradle, where Mrs. Darkley had caused her to deposit him, and risk even the carrying him up and down the steps of the chancel vault; but then she reflected that the doing so after what had already occurred would be sure to make Susan believe there was some mystery about the child which Phœbe did not care to have investigated. Luckily, the boy was asleep, so she said,

'Don't let him be waked, for he'll scream himself into fits if he misses me.'

'No, no; I'll take care.'

Phœbe went out and hurried along the little path, bordered by willows, that led from the sexton's house to the church. It was an old, quaint, ivy-covered edifice, parts of which were supposed to have been built by a Norman—half soldier, half priest—who had followed the fortunes of the Conqueror, and found they led him to a very pleasant manor in this neighbourhood, where he founded the Dalrymple family, and built the first church.

Phœbe could not open either of the usual doors of entrance, and when she knocked loudly she remained unanswered from within. But she remembered a doorway outside the rounded part of the church—one seldom used—and she thought most likely the sexton might have got that open during the funeral for his own convenience. She knocked at the door in question, and it was at once opened by the sexton.

Joshua was a spare little man, with apple-like cheeks, hard, round, and rosy, and merry twinkling eyes, that seemed to see fun (of rather a sepulchral kind perhaps) in everything. At the sight of Phœbe Waterman he made what he intended to

be a most graceful deprecatory movement with his hand, as he glanced down at his musty, professional clothes and clayey boots.

‘Tut, tut, who’d a thought o’ seein’ ladies this time o’ day. Well, and how are you, Mrs. Waterman? I heered as you’d got back—come to see the corffins I suppose, eh?’

‘Yes, Mr. Darkley, if you wouldn’t mind the trouble.’

Trouble! Mr. Darkley’s eyes twinkled, and seemed to express that all reasonable duties that came in his way were rather pleasant than otherwise, only that, on the whole, he didn’t see any occasion for saying so.

‘Where’s your little chap? Brought him back safe and sound?’

‘Yes; and he’s asleep in your own cradle.’ Joshua’s face clouded. Phœbe had thoughtlessly raised a vision of the only funeral that Joshua had not looked at with professional eyes—that of his own and only child, a girl, for whom that cradle had been bought—so he said with some asperity—

‘Come; you’ll have to make haste, if you don’t

want to see the last flag turned back over the hole, and then I shan't take it up for anybody.'

Phœbe passed through the little vestibule, and through another door, and stood in the chancel.

The chancel of Branhape church was a fine picture, at once solemn and beautiful. Through the painted windows a stream of coloured light was falling upon the graceful, slender pillars and arches that extended all round the face of the wall, and gilding the statues in the recesses, that called to mind the more eminent members of the squire's family. There was the cross-legged Crusader, lying recumbent in eternal rest after his life of feverish activity in the cause of what he deemed religion. There was the Judge, sitting as in the wonted state of his tribunal, looking the very incarnation of passionless, even-handed, even-souled justice. And there was the charming figure of the maiden daughter of a last-century Squire who had perished through a noble act of devotedness. While lying one day on the banks of the ornamental water she had noticed two children come to the edge at a little distance, and try to get at the water-lilies that grew on the surface,

and which were then in full bloom. A minute more and they were both struggling in the water. She ran, got one out, and, though herself much exhausted, again went to seek the other, who had sunk. She plunged again and again, found the child, brought it to land, saved its life, but lost her own, having lived but a few days after.

Phœbe had heard this story before, but she did not stop the sexton when he began to tell it to her again. Indeed, she rather wanted him to talk while they were together to save her from talking, and to keep his thoughts away from her ; and she was secretly wondering how she might, when they got below, get rid of him for a little while, so that she and the dead might be left alone to their sad communion.

‘Take care,’ he suddenly called out, ‘or you’ll get down sooner than you want.’

Phœbe started ; she was on the very edge of the black opening into the vault, and had not noticed it owing to the peculiar light, or rather the partially glorified obscurity of the place.

‘Now then, I’ll go first. The steps are good enough if you don’t try to take ’em two at a time.’

He moved downward till his head was on a level with the surrounding pavement; then, holding one hand and arm firmly up, he said—

‘There, take hold, and don’t let go till I tell you.’ Phœbe obeyed, and felt her hand tremble in his the while. He noticed it too, and said—

‘Ay, it’s a queer place to go down into, and especially towards gloaming. Not many women, I guess, would ha’ the boldness to venture. But women, I suppose, will do anything for a babby.’

Phœbe said nothing, but went down—lower and lower still, supported by Joshua Darkley’s strong arm, and for so many steps that she got quite nervous as to the depth, in case she were to fall, or the steps to give way. She began also to feel the air oppress her. Death seemed to enter into her veins with every breath she drew. She wished herself back again in the sunshine, but still she went quietly downwards till her foot rested at last on the invisible floor. And then she stood for an instant or two in entire darkness, while Joshua lighted a lantern he had brought with him from the cottage in case he might need it while putting a finish to the day’s job.

By the feeble rays thus emitted Phœbe was gradually able to see that she was in a round brick chamber with stone ribs meeting in the centre of the hollow roof; and that there was a low and wide stone table or shelf that extended all round the place on which stood coffins in various stages of decay, yet with bright gleams of metal appearing through the discoloured surfaces, and among the black velvet strips that hung about them in rags.

‘Here they are, all on ’em, for the last two centuries—father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter—all gathered together from different parts of the world, as though they couldn’t, you see, rest anywhere in the end but at home.’

Phœbe’s eyes ran rapidly round, looking for the newest incomer to the place. Joshua raised his lantern and said—

‘Come a bit this way. There it is.’ He pointed to a very handsome coffin, one large enough for a full-grown person.

‘But the child?’ whispered Phœbe.

‘Why, inside o’ that to be sure; the big ’un’s for the poor lady. It was the steward as proposed

to the squire to have things done in that way; but between you and I and the post there, of all the people that's giv' out to be drowned more comes back than stays away—and if so be as *she* was to come back—'

'What!' cried Phœbe wildly, 'what are you talkin' about? Didn't I see her drowned? Can the sea give up its dead?'

'Heyday, an' bless us! but you needn't make a man's words choke him. Did I say as she'd come back? I was a goin' to say, if so be she did, she wouldn't thank Mr. Pample for providin' this for her. I know I shouldn't.'

Phœbe could scarcely speak for agitation, but she did manage to express her disappointment at not seeing the coffin of the child. Thus enclosed, it seemed as much shut out from her eyes and her heart as if she had never ventured into so dreadful a place in the hope of a closer communion.

But she knew how to deal with Mr. Darkley if dealings were at all possible. So presently she began,

'Well, I told my people at home I'd see the last

of him, though I had come back so late; and that's why I troubled you and the missus. But I can afford to pay you for loss of time, and I'll take it kindly if you'll help me.'

'What do you mean? That I'm to unscrew the lids of both coffins, and let you see the dead babby face to face? Not if I know it, Mrs. Waterman. It's onreasonable!'

'Come, Mr. Darkley, you *have* obliged people afore now.' Joshua pricked up his ears at that. It sounded queer, he thought; even menacing, and as though it intimated a particular knowledge. He began to wonder if he had ever let out anything about graveyard secrets to Phœbe's husband. He couldn't remember any, but he didn't feel quite so secure as to be inclined to display a flag of defiance.

'I'd have to fetch tools; and there'd be no end o' trouble,' he objected.

'Well, Joshua, you know when a woman has a whim she ought to be humoured. You can't deny that, can you? Here, take this, and do as I tell you.' Phœbe put a half-guinea in Joshua's hand, who at once pocketed it, and said,

‘Wait you here. Don’t be afraid, I’ll soon be back.’ He put the lantern on the ground and began to mount the steps.

Phœbe, who had done this as much to get rid of him for an instant as for the reasons alleged, no sooner saw his legs disappear through the opening at the top of the steps, than she threw herself on her knees beside the coffin, and poured forth all that passion of tears which had been long gathering, long repressed, but which now found unrestricted way at last. Her whole frame quivered. She sobbed audibly, in spite of the danger of the sexton’s overhearing her; and again and again she murmured in tones of the deepest anguish,

‘My boy! My own, my own! Don’t think I have ceased to love thee because another is in thy place. It is for thy sake I love him; for thy sake I want him. Oh, darling, darling!’

After a few moments she experienced some relief. She grew calmer. She began to dry her tears. Again the future put forth its claims. The sense of danger for a moment forgotten, revived. Already her thoughts wandered towards Mrs. Beck, and to

the possibility of meeting with her at the sexton's. By the time Joshua returned Phœbe was quite herself again, and had determined upon a change of purpose.

‘Well, after all, Joshua, I think we won't trouble to open the coffins. I've seen the vault, and that's enough for one like me to say.’

‘Meaning,’ observed Joshua drily, ‘you want the half-guinea back?’

‘Well, no, Joshua;’ and Phœbe managed to raise a laugh that had a most unearthly sound in that vaulted place. ‘I think I've a little more sense than to expect that from you, Joshua.’

Joshua appreciated the compliment, and grew at once respectful and contented. As he took up the lantern, and as they both stopped for a last look round, when they reached the steps, he said,

‘What stories they do tell, sure-ly, of places like these! I was reading the other day in a book as how there is a vault in some forin' country where they never goes into it, after it has been a long time closed, but they find the coffins all abroad, as it were; some sticking up on end—some at the

top as were before at the bottom, and vicey-varcey.'

'But you don't believe it?' hoarsely asked Phœbe, whose eyes were trying to make out the exact form of some shadow that puzzled her, and which she fancied moved.

'Well, I never see'd anything of the sort here,' was Joshua's cautious reply; for he didn't at all desire to lessen the natural and superstitious terrors that hung about his vocation. But Phœbe's thoughts were turned suddenly in another course by the remark, 'I had to go home for the tools, and I found Mrs. Beck there. She's jist come in to tea.'

Phœbe heard, and thought to herself as she ascended the steps—

'As I live, that woman's watching me! She has guessed I might come here. What does it all mean? She cannot really suspect the truth? O no! no! no! She was to have stayed with Stephen and prepared supper. It's very odd. But I'm not going to be frightened; I know I'm safe. And I'll let her know what I think if she ventures to hint anything.'

The baby was still asleep—as Phœbe was glad to find—and the two women were at their tea. Susan did not wait for questions, but said at once,

‘I thought you’d have a deal to do, and that you wouldn’t be able to get home yet awhile; and as Stephen wanted to finish that wonderful box of his to surprise you with it to-morrow, I thought I’d come and have a cup of tea with Mrs. Darkley. But I little thought o’ meeting you here.’

Phœbe stooped to look at the babe as she quietly replied, ‘If I hadn’t ha’ come to-night the vault would ha’ been shut up; and o’ course I wanted to see the place where the poor dear was buried—and his mother and father so kind to me! The squire says he’ll be a friend to my boy, and he’s going to be his godfather.’

‘Godfather!’ was echoed by the others.

‘Yes,’ said Phœbe with a little of her old arrogance peeping out, ‘and he’s to be called Guy.’

‘Why, that’s one of the Dalrymple names; that cross-legged knight you seed in the chancel was a Sir Guy,’ observed the sexton.

‘And,’ continued Phœbe, rising and coming to-

wards the table, 'he has given me this for my boy as his godfather's gift.' And Phœbe took off the watch and chain, and laid them on the table; and waited in silence to enjoy their exclamations of wonder as they looked at and examined them, all eagerly pressing round.

'Why, it must ha' cost a mint o' money!' said Joshua. 'It's a repeater. Hark! I'll make it strike and tell us the time.' And while he did so, and while Phœbe watched him with a proud aspect, she caught, suddenly, Mrs. Beck's eyes looking at her with an undefinable expression of curiosity and envy, or dislike, that made her wish once more she was safe at home, and the packet from Mrs. Dalrymple hidden where no jealous scrutiny might ever find it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WORKSHOP AT TANFIELD.

PHŒBE would not share the tea-table delicacies proffered to her; she was naturally anxious, she said, to get back to Stephen, and to see about the bit of supper that had to be got ready. And wouldn't Mr. and Mrs. Darkley join them in two or three hours' time?

Of course the sexton and his wife accepted the invitation; for Phœbe was just now the most interesting person in the parish—more decidedly interesting even than the poor squire himself; for he had not been a sharer in the romantic expedition, nor nursed the dead baby, nor seen Mrs. Dalrymple die; and Phœbe Waterman had done all these things. So it was soon settled that they were to meet for a late supper at Stephen's house; and Susan Beck was to return in good time to her duties of helping in

the preparations—duties which she had already undertaken, but somehow forgot to fulfil in her love of gossiping with Mrs. Darkley, or of fondness for Mrs. Darkley's buttered hot cakes, or, perhaps, of desire to watch Phœbe's operations from the near ground of the sexton's house.

For as Phœbe went homewards, with the boy once more tucked under her shawl, she was at a loss to know which of these motives it really was that had so suddenly tempted her neighbour to invite herself out to tea.

'I wonder,' thought Phœbe to herself, 'if I had better make her a handsome present? I might give her one of the trinkets my lady gave to me. I know she likes that sort of finery, and I know she has been quiet about awkward matters that she might ha' mentioned when people have amused her in that way. But all depends upon what she thinks herself at the time. If there is a secret, and it's one that troubles some poor lady's mind, but that wouldn't much amuse the world even if it knew all about it, Mrs. Beck can be demure enough, and a gift then goes a long way, even if no word be said. I've seen

it of her, and I know it's true, though she thinks me blind. But if she fancied she'd got an inkling of a real secret—one like this of mine—a gift would be sure to confirm her notion, and she'd get more and more bold and unconscionable every day. No, no, Mrs. Beck! you won't catch me at that gate, I promise you!

Still Phœbe felt uncomfortable as she recalled the furtive look which had escaped Susan while the watch was being displayed. Phœbe wanted to remain what she had so long been—friendly with her clever neighbour; and she could not help, therefore, fancying it might be wise to try to win her somehow. So presently she said to herself,

‘Yes, I'll give her the brooch. It's not so very valuable as to seem intended to mean anything particular; and I know she admires it, for when I showed it to her as my lady's gift on my last birthday she took it up so often and praised it so very much that I got quite hot and uncomfortable—it looked so like wanting it from me. Yes, I'll give it to her, and say it's for her attention to Stephen while I've been away. She did promise she would

look to him, and I dare say she has. Yes, I'll do that; and afterwards, if she follows me about, or makes me speak at all, by hinting at anything mysterious in me or my behaviour, I'll let her see that I laugh at her absurdity, and that I can deal with her insolence. Oh, if that packet were but safe! I used to feel as if it burned into my flesh whenever I felt it knock against me; but now I want it back, and I feel horribly frightened every time I miss it.'

And here Phœbe asked herself should she go direct home, and trust to visiting the workshop late in the night or early morning, or should she go now, and get rid of the anxiety at once? She was more likely to be seen, and might be more easily watched now, during the evening light while people were about. But then the fact of her going to the shed at such a time was not calculated to raise a question in anybody's mind, unless it were in that of the incomprehensible Mrs. Beck. On the other hand, if she went an hour or two after midnight, no mortal eye would be at all likely to watch her doings there; but the very fact of her going at all, if

known, might be fatal. Phœbe decided to go at once. And she was the more readily led to this conclusion from remembering that she knew just then exactly where Susan Beck was, and how she was engaged.

Phœbe had to go a long way round to get into Tanfield (where the workshop stood) without being seen from the village. She met no one. There was an opening in the hedge separating Tanfield from the cow-pastures; and getting through this she made her way to the workshop, bending down very low so that the long grass concealed her from any eyes that might have been looking from her own garden door, or from the windows of the adjoining cottages.

As soon as she was in the shed she closed the door, stooped with the babe in her arms, while she made him a bed of the shavings, and then laid him down. All this day the babe, partly through the operation of some opiate which Phœbe had administered, and partly, perhaps, through the sleepiness induced by so much exposure to the air, had been very quiet, and scarcely given Phœbe the least

trouble, but now he began to cry. Phœbe, frightened at the noise, took him up, soothed him, and put him down again. The child, however, cried louder than ever. What was to be done? For Phœbe to be found there, and unable to explain satisfactorily how she had got in without passing the house would be most dangerous. While hesitating she groped on her knees for the packet, with the aid of a stick, and found it just where she had left it. She then glided to the door, and thence to the window and looked out. No one was near. Distressing as were the child's cries, they could not be heard unless there were bystanders. Phœbe felt she must go on, heedless of the babe.

She went to her husband's tool-basket: she took from it a long tool—once a chisel, now perhaps a screwdriver, for it had lost its edge. With this in her hand, she began to survey very closely the surface of the walls. They were of brick, not very well laid originally, nor very abundantly supplied with mortar. Phœbe's idea—one that she had been slowly maturing at intervals all through the day—was that she could find or make a place behind the

bricks in which to deposit the dangerous package. She recollected that a brick had been once loosened by Stephen low down the wall when he wanted to knock in a nail ; and that the brick had been taken out by him and left out for some time. And he had then got into a habit of placing his tools at times on the brickwork at the bottom of the aperture, using it as a shelf or ledge, until he found the tools were continually tumbling down at the back into a hollow between the front layer and a second layer behind, from which he found it tedious to get them up. It had struck Phœbe that this was the kind of place for her. The wall was dry. No accident was at all likely to injure the book or the letter within ; and no safer place, she thought, could be desired, if only she could be sure of getting it secretly and safely deposited at the beginning. *That* was the point, and Phœbe showed how seriously conscious she was of it by stopping continually to listen between the fits of the babe's crying. Once she thought she heard some one approaching, and she stood a vivid picture of alarm, expectation, and conscious guilt. After a moment's pause she

dropped to the floor, not allowing her clothes to rustle, and put her head to the ground and kept it there for a time that, however short in itself, must have seemed an age to the agitated listener. Satisfied at last, she drew herself forward on her knees to the baby's bed of shavings, kissed her ill-gotten prize, murmuring the while, 'Hush, darling, hush! We'll go soon.'

Continuing her survey over the higher parts of the wall, for she would not have the place within easy reach, she could not by sight alone convince herself where to begin. She wanted to find a brick so square and complete at the edges and strong-looking that she might venture to force it out of its bed, and yet hope to be able to replace it so that it might look as immovable as the rest. Then, again, it seemed to her that, if she could find one of the bricks already and accidentally loose, she would get more quickly and more neatly through the task. So she went round the wall, reaching as high as she could with her instrument, standing upon a clump of wood, which she pushed before her as she went, and tapping and thrusting at the brickwork with no

other result than to get her eyes full of dust and mortar.

The babe was still crying, and time fast passing away. Mrs. Beck might have come back, and, missing Phœbe, might come direct to the workshop. There would be a sight for her! The mere fancy of it set Phœbe at work with fresh and more desperate vigour. With almost superhuman strength she managed to drag or push—she hardly stopped to know or think which—Stephen's heavy bench, inch by inch, towards the wall, until she thought it was sufficiently near. She leaped upon it with an agility that fashionable ladies might envy, and at once set to work at a particular brick that struck her fancy. It fitted its place so very closely that there had been little room for mortar, a fact that was easily accounted for: it was one entire and genuine brick among a host of broken and shabby counterfeits that had been used, doubtless, over and over again, descending probably a step each time until the baked clay that had first served for some aristocratic mansion had been used up finally in Stephen Waterman's shed. But the brick would

not move. It seemed to Phœbe that, if she continued to prize at it so strongly she should bring down half-a-dozen of its neighbours instead. So she began to insert the tool bit by bit all the way round — a tedious process, and one that almost drove Phœbe mad to have to do at such a time. When she had got once round it she pushed at it, but it did not move. She struck at it with the rounded wooden end of the tool-handle, but still it seemed fast. Again she had to go slowly and patiently round, inserting the tool more deeply, and prizing with it from time to time, but it stuck as fast as ever, and seemed to defy all Phœbe's efforts. She stopped, fatigued. Her arms ached with their inconvenient position in being raised so high at the work. Phœbe began to blame her stupidity. She was no bricklayer, and had only a woman's art, and a woman's ordinary knowledge to help her, and they failed her now. Tears of vexation started to her eyes. Suddenly it struck her to try what she could do with the adjoining brick, which was of a more broken shape. She managed to lodge the sharp end of the tool in a little crevice, and so to

get a leverage against the neighbouring edge, and to her delight the broken brick moved. She repeated the operation with care, each time getting it a little farther, and at last she drew it out with ease ; and then she found that by putting her hand into the vacant space she could also draw out the perfect one. Putting down the two bricks in succession on the bench, she bared her arm and felt within the aperture ; but there was no hollow behind. Should she chip a piece off from one of the bricks she had removed, or should she try to make a space in the second layer at the back ? She felt again with her hand, and fancied it was some kind of rough rubbish, not brick, at the back. She began, therefore, to dig by striking with the tool in her right hand while clearing away with her left, every now and then, the rubbish she made. And thus, too, she tested the increasing size of the space.

It was horrible to her, all this delay, which seemed as if it would have no end. Once she was about to put in the packet and try if it left room for the brick, but the fear she would only lose time uselessly—that she had not yet made the hole large

enough—drove her on still striking with irregular strength and flickering energy for some little time longer. Then at last, when she had measured the distance from the front by the aid of the screwdriver, and saw it must be sufficient if she only rested the packet on its edge, she stopped, rested the tool on the bench, wiped the perspiration from her brow and her hands, and paused to look round and listen. All was still—even the babe had cried itself to sleep at last.

Completely reassured, Phœbe took the packet from her pocket and turned to place it in the newly-made receptacle. At that moment she felt her gown plucked, the blood rushed into her face and then left it deadly white, her knees quivered, and she dropped half-fainting on the bench, with the exclamation,

‘ O God ! who is that ? ’

CHAPTER XV.

PHŒBE AND SUSAN COME TO AN ARMISTICE.

THERE was no answer to Phœbe's cry of terror ; no sound even. She turned as soon as her faculties began to rally, and then perceived, with a sense of inexpressible relief, that her dress had caught upon the sharp edge of a screw driven into the bench, and against which Stephen was accustomed to rest the end of a piece of wood when planing it.

Phœbe laughed hysterically as she released her dress, and said to herself, ' What an idiot I was to be so scared at nothing ! '

Standing erect once more, she now, after another glance round, pushed the packet into its place ; and then put in one of the bricks, which fitted nicely, and then the other, which would not fit at all, but stuck out several inches beyond its place. With a sigh of vexation Phœbe drew it out, and found, as

she supposed, that the packet had fallen down. Again she set it on edge, and with greater care, and tested its balanced position by a slight tap which did not disturb it. Again she lifted the well-formed brick from the bench and pushed it in quite home. She stepped back to look. The result was all she could have desired. If now she could only fix these two bricks so that no one might find them loose, either through accident or suspicion, she would be able to rest in peace. She stepped lightly from the bench, found a hard, thin, wedge-shaped bit of wood among the chips on the floor. This she inserted between the two bricks, and drove it so far that it was quite imperceptible to the eye. She pushed against the bricks; they were as immovable as ever. She knocked strongly against each with the handle of the screw-driver, but they were quite fast, seeming to be one with the rest of the wall, and to ring like the rest.

‘Thank God!’ said Phœbe, as she got down from the bench. People will thank God at times when engaged in anything but godly practices.

She now brushed hastily up together into a heap all

the dust and bits of mortar which she had deposited on the bench during her operations. She swept the bench with her clean white pocket-handkerchief until the wood was almost as clean. Then she took up the heap in her joined hands and transferred it to the handkerchief, rolled it tightly up, and put it in her pocket; and, lastly, she blew away whatever might remain of the dust on the bench.

But there was the bench itself to get back to its place. It was wonderful how much heavier it seemed now than before. Phœbe actually despaired of success when she first began to try to move it. But she had done it, she knew that; and she must do it again—that was equally clear. So with great bodily distress it was finally achieved.

With heaving frame and panting breath she looked again about her with a long, searching, listening, and satisfying look. No mysterious eyes were seen peering in upon her—no wandering foot-step was heard moving stealthily away.

Yes, it was done, Phœbe thought. Her secret was safe within that wall, whence no hand but

her own was ever likely to bring it forth except at her desire.

Now, then, to get into the cottage. Phœbe tried to take up the babe without waking it, but failed ; so she put it to the breast ; and thus encumbered, she unlocked the door, glided out again, keeping below the front of the hedge, forced a passage through the hedge at the back, got into the field, and so again into the high road, where she shook out the contents of her handkerchief, and where a short walk brought her into the proper route.

Scarcely two minutes later she heard a hasty step behind. She turned, and there was Mrs. Beck !

‘So, Mrs. Waterman, I have overtaken you ! Why, I thought you’d ha’ got home ever so long ago,’ observed Mrs. Beck, as she came up to Phœbe, rather out of breath, and seemingly a little moved out of her ordinarily passionless exterior.

‘Yes ; I was so tired, and the dear boy is so heavy, I couldn’t get on fast,’ replied Phœbe.

‘I met Old Farnley, the shepherd, on the road, and he said he hadn’t seen you,’ was the next remark.

Phœbe quaked a little as she received this dangerous flying shot, that seemed to say it was known that she had been somewhere out of her proper road ; but she replied, with creditable presence of mind—

‘ Oh, I went into the field to sit down on the grass out of sight of the passers-by ; ’ and she was going to add that she had seen old Farnley if he had not seen her, but remembered that the lie was not necessary, and might be dangerous with a woman so acute as Mrs. Beck.

‘ Do you mean at the white gate leading into the cow pastures ? ’

Phœbe saw the critical and long-expected moment had come. If she ventured a single step further in her replies she might be entangled ; yet if she did not, what could she do ? She answered that question by turning round full on Mrs. Beck, and looking at her with eyes that, if they lacked that lady’s power of concealing thought and emotion, possessed in vivid development the exactly opposite quality—that of revealing whatever mood of passion or sentiment was uppermost in Phœbe at the

time. Mrs. Beck found it a hard task to confront with her own calm, scrutinizing gaze those fierce glittering orbs, that seemed full of the lightning flash ; but she did do it, even though the unfathomable grey eye appeared to grow smaller and smaller, as if shrinking back into the obscurity it so much loved.

‘ Now, Susan Beck, I think it’s high time to tell you a bit of my mind. Ever since we met to-day, instead of welcoming me in a kind, neighbour-like way, you seem to ha’ been watching me, and diving into me, and suspecting me ; and now, before we get home, and run the risk of spoiling our supper, let’s have it out and ha’ done with it ; for I tell you plainly, Mrs. Beck, I won’t stand it, and if you vex me by any more of this kind of behaviour I shall be like to forget my manners and slap your face for you.’

Susan smiled, just a little, but soon relapsed into her ordinary aspect of seriousness as she said, taking no notice of the personal threat,

‘ Hoity-toity, here’s a to-do ! as though you had only now learned for the first time that I am an

inquisitive sort of body, and make it my business to know all about my neighbours' affairs.'

'No you don't, unless you expect to get something by it.' Phœbe felt that she had here repaid Susan, who seemed to feel so too, for she laughed and looked conscious, a most uncommon thing for her. 'Now,' continued Phœbe, 'what do you expect to get out of me?'

'Well, just the rights of the story, that's all,' meekly replied Susan Beck.

'Do you mean I haven't told the truth about it, or about my lady,—or—about the child?'

'Or about what you have got over the affair,' interposed Mrs. Beck, in the same tone, and just as though it was really Phœbe speaking, not herself. And by this one unlucky remark (made, too, in opposition to her own usual practice never to say an unnecessary word) she convinced Phœbe that, after all, she not only knew nothing, but that even her suspicions must have gone in a wrong direction. After a moment's pause to enjoy the relief this gave her, she burst into a hearty laugh as she put out her hand to her neighbour, who took it into her own,

which had always a clammy feel, and said, ‘Well, I dare say, Susan, you can’t understand how it is that I could have been so great a fool as not to think about these matters, but I didn’t, and that’s the long and short of it. And if you want to know all that I did get, why, I’ll tell you with the greatest pleasure in the world. She gave me a hundred pounds, twenty of it for myself and husband, and the rest to be put by for the boy.’

Phœbe said this with so much heartiness and truthfulness of manner (as she very well might, since it *was* true) that Susan, after a long look at Phœbe’s face, showed that she was unwillingly convinced; and she tried to smile in accordance with her professed satisfaction, but she couldn’t, so discontinued the attempt. And thus ended Susan Beck’s last direct effort to extract anything to her advantage from Phœbe’s own admissions. Whether she was in her real mind satisfied that Phœbe had no secret to tell, and that the words she had overheard at the funeral about Phœbe keeping her own counsel meant nothing of any moment, we may, perhaps, learn more about as we proceed with this

history. But for the present she was silenced. She saw that Phœbe would be an awkward person to deal with if she—Mrs. Beck—continued obviously to watch her; and that she would lose a valuable neighbour if she allowed the quarrel to go on; and then, she asked herself with timely prudence, where was Susy to go to during her mother's frequent engagements from home?

These considerations worked a marvellous change in Susan. If she seldom smiled herself (and then only when the smile meant something that the receiver of it would be anything but inclined to reciprocate, if the meaning were fully understood) she knew how to make others smile when she pleased. She was full of anecdotes; and, as they were mostly based on her own personal experience, and were told with extraordinary shrewdness, and with a vein of amusing though corroding satire, they were naturally very interesting to a person like Phœbe, who soon recovered her old leaning towards her neighbour, and listened, and laughed, and commented briefly in an enjoying spirit of reply till they reached the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER HER DAY'S WORK PHŒBE ENJOYS HER SUPPER.

WHATEVER of gloom, or doubt, or fear, or vacillation of purpose affected Phœbe through all this long and (for her) memorable day disappeared when she sat down at night to supper at her own board to help Stephen to entertain their numerous guests. All her old self came out again. The characteristic traits were a little exaggerated perhaps by a certain necessity for effort, but not spoiled. She was genial, light-hearted, full of frolic, playing off occasionally a practical joke that was met with roars of laughter, attentive to everybody, and so hospitable that she made everyone feel at home and quite prepared for a real feast.

Stephen, too, had for once been generous and open-handed in his caterings for the table. Right

before the sexton, Mr. Darkley, was a duck stuffed with such appetizing herbs that he grew ill-tempered at the ceremonial delays ; and more than once took up his knife with a threatening gesture to cut into it, but dropped it again despairingly, as he saw that no one imitated his example. And there were the marrowfats growing cold : such magnificent ones Joshua had never seen, and he wondered where they came from ; and then he wondered if he could get equally fine ones if he were to plant some of the seed in that little corner of his garden which joined the old churchyard. It was wonderful how luxuriantly everything grew in that corner ; and Joshua, if he guessed the reason, didn't at all mind it if only he could get such marrowfats. A piece of roast beef, flanked with Yorkshire pudding, was before Stephen ; who stood up with a snowy-white handkerchief tucked into the pockets of his newly-washed cream-coloured waistcoat, bowing every instant to the guests as they came in from the garden, where they had lounged about in a spirit of courtesy (knowing there was no second room to receive them) till told all was ready. And, lastly, in front of

Phœbe, who took her place at the other end opposite Stephen, was an enormous rabbit-pie, which she cut into between the pauses of her talk, and thus let out fresh and still more tantalizing odour towards the nose of Joshua Darkley, which had not been at all spoiled by his peculiar occupation. In fact, as a good background is an indispensable adjunct to a good picture, so it might almost be said that Joshua found the graveyard scent which always clung about him only a kind of heightening or relief to whatever of a more agreeable nature might approach his olfactory nerves. At all events, it is a fact that Joshua was not only a great eater but a refined epicure in all those preliminary monitions that diffuse beforehand the knowledge of agreeable eating to come. And if we have not given the right theory, it is, at all events, the only one that we are prepared to offer, since Joshua himself never condescended to explanations.

The guests were, of course, all humble but mostly well-to-do people, small tradesmen, small farmers, and comfortable mechanics, with their wives. There was a carrier and his wife. He was a big, bulky

man, as famous for his size as for his love of gossip, and dearly loved to hear of a new scandal or to get a listener to whom it might be retailed, as he drove along under his canvas roof through the green lanes in his regular expeditions to the great town some fifteen miles distant. He had a loud, explosive way of talking, that made the smallest facts assume importance when related by him, and a love of humour that kept him from making his other habits an infiction.

Susan Beck at first took a seat that was offered to her by the carrier's side ; but finding that everybody listened to what he was saying to her whenever he spoke, so that if a promising secret oozed out everybody must share it, she shifted her quarters, saying, with a laugh, and pointing to him the while, 'I'm afraid of him, he's such a big man! Besides, he's got his own wife by his side, and I don't think I ought to desert Stephen, who hasn't got his yet.' So saying, and pretending to look defiantly at Phœbe, who laughed an answer, Mrs. Beck went and took the vacant chair by Stephen's right hand.

Phœbe, who had been watching for just such a chance as this, now observed,

‘Come, neighbours, sit down. We’re all here, I think. Just twelve! no; why, I declare there’s thirteen. That won’t do. It’s unlucky.’

‘Shall I go away?’ asked Mrs. Beck, demurely.

‘Yes,’ said Phœbe, saucily, and made a slight pause before she continued, with a laugh; ‘do, and fetch Susy.’

‘Oh, she’s in bed,’ replied Mrs. Beck, looking pleased at the suggestion.

‘All the better; she’ll think the more of the feast when she’s called up to it,’ observed Phœbe; ‘but do make haste. The pie’s getting cold.’

‘So’s the duck!’ savagely growled Joshua.

‘I’ll be back in two minutes. You musn’t mind her dress.’ And away Susan went.

Phœbe then took out of her breast a large and very handsome cameo brooch, the gift of her late mistress, and handed it to the carrier, saying,

‘When you’ve looked at it pass it to my old man. Ay, Stephen,’ she continued, in answer to his inquiring look, ‘it’s the last time you’ll handle it, I promise you! Now, don’t stare so, and don’t look so woe-begone! It’s a nice brooch, isn’t it? What’ll

you give me for it?’ added Phœbe, turning her brilliant eyes on the carrier and making them look at him quite languishingly.

The carrier wondered whether she really meant to give it to him, and whether a kiss was the price he was to offer, and, in his doubt, turned to look at his little wife, who didn't at all seem to approve of the position. Again Phœbe laughed, and watched the cameo as it went round from hand to hand, but she said no more till the return of Susan Beck with the child.

Everyone was startled to see the latter. Notwithstanding the shortness of the time, and the fact of her being in bed—possibly asleep—when disturbed by her mother's call, she stood there smiling graciously, and quite self-possessed, in the richest finery that her fond mother's long and patient care had been able to bestow. She did not seem at all astonished, but moved forwards, graceful as a little queen, to ascend the chair or throne offered her; and as she reached the proper altitude, by the aid of a footstool on the chair, she shook her curls, and glanced smilingly round, and then sat, serious

and demure, prepared for whatever else was to happen.

Susan was so engrossed by her child and its appearance, and by the general murmur of admiration which her beauty and the unexpected apparition of so elegantly-dressed a little creature excited, that she scarcely noticed the cameo which Stephen, in obedience to a signal from his wife, had pushed towards her hand. But when he again pushed it, and she felt the touch, she looked, and took it up, with a glance at Phœbe, as if to know why her cameo was lying there on the table.

‘Like it, Mrs. Beck?’ inquired Phœbe.

‘Yes, very well,’ answered Susan, carelessly, for she remembered how she had tried to get that brooch presented to her on a former occasion; and she thought Phœbe might have had more sense than to parade her wealth now.

‘But look at it again—is it valuable?’ inquired Phœbe.

‘Yes, very, I should say,’ was Susan’s response, and uttered with more animation than before; for she became aware that something was

going on, and that she ought not to offend her hostess.

‘Well, then,’ said Phœbe, rising, and with a certain grace and dignity that showed she liked giving, and had a spark of the grand old spirit of generosity in her—‘well then, Susan, while I beg to thank you for your kindness and attention to Stephen in my absence, I hope you’ll accept that brooch, and wear it for my sake in remembrance.’

For once Susan was almost overpowered. Phœbe had done the thing so unexpectedly and so handsomely that she didn’t know what to make of it.

The child clapped her hands loudly, and called out—

‘Oh, let me see—let me see! When I’m bigger you’ll let me wear it, won’t you?’

The mother at once fastened it upon the little thing’s breast, and, as soon as she had done so, turned to Phœbe and said—

‘I’m sure you won’t think I value it less because I put it here to-night. Perhaps, Phœbe, after all, it may return to the family.’

The hit was well-timed, and told immensely upon

the listeners, and caused everyone to glance towards the cradle—everyone, at least, but Phœbe, who gave a faint laugh of acknowledgment, and then, without another word, plunged into the savoury depths of the rabbit-pie, and began to evoke from its bottom tender pieces of rumpsteak, and little square lumps of bacon, to add to the already rich plateful destined for the hungry Joshua.

And then the supper began in right-down earnest. No more talking now, no more ceremony. Phœbe herself set the example, and kindled her husband into a state of temporary forgetfulness of the cost, while she and he continued to replenish the failing plates of the guests, until at last even the big carrier was constrained to cry for mercy, and say he really could eat no more.

But the meat over, Phœbe opened upon the jaded supper-eaters with new batteries. Delicious red and black currant puddings, and mince roley-poleys, admitted of no parley. And when these had been discussed, and followed by cream-cheese and old double Gloucester, and the cheese again by a cleared table, and by a brilliant display of decanters seve-

rally labelled rum, gin, and brandy, and by a large array of tumblers, and hot water, and lemons, the general feeling burst out with unanimous consent in the exploding voice of the carrier,—

‘ Well, I must say, Mr. and Mrs. Waterman, and I say for every one of us—’

‘ Ay, ay, every one on us,’ echoed Joseph Darkley, while hands began to clap, and feet to kick against the floor.

‘ I must say, for everyone of us,’ repeated the carrier, ‘ that I never had a better supper in my life ; and I beg to drink your good health, both of you, and of your little chap ; and may he grow up to be a credit to the name of —’ Here the orator paused, and wiped his forehead, trying to remember if he had yet heard the name.

‘ Guy Waterman,’ interposed Phœbe.

‘ Guy !—Guy ! Why, that’s one of the names in the squire’s family !’

‘ It was he who gave it,’ announced Phœbe proudly, and for the first time in public.

‘ Indeed !’ The carrier looked hard at Phœbe, and then at Stephen, as though some queer thought

had passed through his mind ; but he had the grace to keep it to himself. ‘ Well, then, here’s to the health of Guy Waterman, as well as to his respected parents.’

Of course the proposition was enthusiastically received. Again and again the glasses rattled with vigorous thumps upon the table. And while gradually the excitement calmed down, and while the people all round tasted the mixed spirit-and-water to see if they had got it right, and, on being satisfied, said—

‘ Your health, Mr. Waterman ; your health, Mrs. Waterman ; your health, Mr. Guy Waterman ;’ the last being esteemed a capital joke, the little girl suddenly called out in her clear, shrill, piercing voice—

‘ Me too ! Me too !’

‘ You, pussy ?’ said the admiring mother.

‘ Yes ; don’t you know he’s to be my husband ?—that is, if I like him,’—said she archly, and looking round upon the company.

This produced a general roar, and ended in the little lady’s health being also drunk, though, as

Phœbe observed, it wouldn't do to couple the children together as future man and wife, seeing that Miss Susy herself had not yet made up her mind.

And so the supper went on.

Phœbe did not wait to see the last of her guests, but, leaving them to the care of Stephen on the natural plea of fatigue, and the desire to get her baby to bed, wished them all good-night, kissed Susanna affectionately, and disappeared with her boy.

Let us follow her for a brief space to her bedroom : it is the last time we shall see her for some years.

She puts the boy to rest in a little crib beside the bed where she and Stephen sleep. At first she seems so thoroughly tired and exhausted, that she can only just manage to bend her thoughts upon her duties to the child. She goes about these in a quiet, methodical manner ; and one might think, from her listless demeanour, that neither past nor future is to her of more than its ordinary importance to us all. But she is simply getting rid of the strain that has so long prayed upon her faculties and bowed her down. This solitude is precious to her—and

yet painful. It is her first moment of real rest ; of actual feeling that henceforth she *can* rest that she has yet had since her eventful determination. But when the babe is asleep she rises and begins to stretch her arms and to walk about the room and to look about her, as though conscious of the removal of a burden, yet as if afraid of giving way to too vivid an expression of the relief. But as she runs over all the incidents of the day—her meeting with Mr. Dalrymple, and its entirely successful nature ; her visit to her own true child in the chancel vault, and the melancholy satisfaction she thus finally had ; her safe deposit of the packet that alone contains the evidence of her guilt ; her struggle with and conquest over Mrs. Beck ; and, lastly, her reception by her neighbours, and the general acceptance of her story as one, not only true in itself, but as giving her fresh claims to the respect and sympathy of the whole place ;—as she reviews all these things her eye kindles with more and more joyous light, and at last her emotion breaks out into utterances, not loud, but conveying by their tone the exultation of spirit from which they spring—

‘Safe now! I have deceived them all. The boy is mine. No one can now ever find out the truth unless it suits me to tell it. Don’t they say, “No crime ever succeeds?” Well, then, I *have* succeeded; and so—it is no crime.’

Phœbe laughed at her own logic, went to the babe, kissed it, again laughed, as some inward fancy tickled her, and then began slowly to undress, pausing, however, to open the door to listen for a moment if the guests were all gone. She heard, she thought, Stephen and Mrs. Beck talking together confidentially at the door; but she laughed for the third time, and repeated the words as she closed the door—

‘Safe now—and for ever! But what does that woman mean by keeping on so about the two children? I wish I knew. She never thought of such a thing before I went away. I almost wish now I had the packet, somewhere here, under my own eye. Yes, a nice plan that would be! I should want to be always looking at it to see if it were safe, and some day should find Mrs. Beck looking over my shoulder.

‘Why can she be so suddenly smitten with the idea of our two children one day being man and wife? Oh, I know—to be sure. What a fool I was! It’s the gold watch and the hundred pounds, and the squire’s favour, that she sees will be given to Guy. I’m glad I thought of that. Now I shall sleep; ay, now I shall be able to live, and to enjoy myself, and take care of my boy—my own darling—my beautiful fellow—my sweet Guy Waterman!’ She repeated the name lovingly, again and again, as though the sound were a pleasure to her, and so proceeded to undress.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUSANNA'S LEGACY.

NINE years have passed away ; but before we note the changes these years have wrought let us consider an event that is just now going on. From the house adjoining to that of the Watermans, there comes a sound that no one has ever before heard coming through its doors and windows since Susan Beck took up her residence there. It is the low, continuous wail of a woman suffering either from mental or bodily anguish, though it suggests chiefly the latter. Let us look in upon her, where she lies upon the bed, and whence she will never again raise herself, nor be raised until it is to place her in the coffin that will be set on the adjacent chairs.

It is Mrs. Beck arriving at the last of her many plans—that of cheating Death out of a promised victim, and finding that she cannot by any art or

device achieve her aim. And so the courage, such as it is, that never before gave way, fails at last; and she moans feebly, hour after hour, the whole day through; often asking for the doctor, but perfectly well aware he has uttered the irrevocable word; and that he only now visits her, and gives her medicine, in decent regard to her feelings and the usages of his profession. She has often talked with him, has often smiled about this very matter when other poor creatures' lives were concerned.

She is not alone, for Susannah is there now, looking almost a woman; tall, elegantly formed, but slender, as though not yet fully grown. She is quiet and attentive, and speaks to the dying mother as though not only conscious of the impending calamity, but as believing the patient must herself be quite desirous to keep it always in view. Between, therefore, the pauses of her occupation—that of trimming a very pretty summer hat—she asks Mrs. Beck, in a tone of sustained condolence, that might be touching were it not a little monotonous, about her wishes, and what there will be for her Susanna

to do; and there are times even when she wipes away a tear from her face.

Mrs. Beck looks at her, and occasionally stops in the wail to cry impatiently—

‘Do, Susy, do put that down!’

And Susy does so for a little time; but after a few minutes Mrs. Beck is sure to see her with it again, and the spectacle seems to wound and rankle in her heart.

‘I’ve a good mind, you worthless hussy, to die and say nothing about what I know.’ And Mrs. Beck, turning her face to the wall, began again her sad, depressing wail. But the words she had uttered wonderfully quickened the zeal and filial tenderness of the bonnet-smitten Susanna. She stole round to the bottom of the bed and tried to catch her mother’s look; but Mrs. Beck took no notice of her, and only threw up one arm in a kind of despairing gesture towards heaven.

Baffled here, Susanna went back, got on to the bed, and crept to her mother; then lifting one arm, she managed to nestle her head under it. No doubt a pretty and touching movement, and even Susan

Beck was not indifferent to it, for she burst into a fit of weeping, the first she had known for many a long year, and she clasped the girl's head with such convulsive energy that the latter cried out,

‘Oh, mother, you hurt me!’

But Susanna had obtained her end, as she found after lying there quietly for about half-an-hour. Mrs. Beck then turned round and began to talk. She did it so feebly, and yet with such earnestness in her look and voice that Susanna began dimly to understand, and to tremble for that which was approaching near.

‘Don't cry, mother, don't, and I won't touch the bonnet again till—’ Susanna gulped the last word down her throat under cover of a cough, as she remembered the impropriety of what she had been going to say.

‘Susanna, dear!’

‘Yes, mother.’

‘Take my keys. You'll find some money in a little box in a secret drawer at the back of the great drawer in the big chest.’ Susanna pricked up her ears at this, and thought how often, when her mother

had refused her money, she had searched in vain for that very hoard.

‘And, Susanna, dear!’

‘Yes, mother.’

‘You’ll find a book in the drawer with the money. It’s a savings-bank book; and mind you don’t draw the money out till you want it for some very important purpose indeed. You won’t, will you?’

‘O no, not till I’m married.’

‘Yes, that’s right,’ feebly sighed the mother, as she felt her strength going. But presently she said, rather sharply, ‘If you’re the girl I take you for, you’ll keep that unknown to your husband, and so have something to go to when you can’t get help from him.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Susan, with sparkling eyes, ‘that’s much better. *Now* you may be sure, mother, I’ll keep my word, and won’t touch the money till I’m a woman and married.’

‘And Susy, dear!’

‘Yes, mother,’ sighed Susy, with increased and increasing respect as she wondered how many more

of these communications were to follow, and tried to repress her very natural excitement.

‘I didn’t like anybody to know how much I had, and so I used to take money every year to a broker in London, and he laid it out for me; and you’ll find a paper from him in the drawer showing how much he has had of mine to invest; and I think, altogether, Susy, there’s nigh a thousand pounds you’ll be worth.’

‘A thousand pounds, mother!’ and Susanna’s eyes opened as widely as if she had been told she was the heiress to a million; for, although at her early age she had arrived at excellent notions of the value of money in detail, she had had no experience, mental or other, to enable her to appreciate it in the gross. Practically, a thousand pounds was about the limit of her working, every-day imagination in financial matters. No doubt she will improve in that point by-and-by.

‘A thousand pounds, mother!’ she re-echoed, in undisguised wonder.

‘Ay, Susy, dear, it’s a deal of money, ain’t it? I thought to have enjoyed it with you a bit after this

period o' my life, and I've worked hard and done things for it I don't like to think on now.'

'Then don't, mother dear,' logically and kindly suggested Susanna.

'Ay, but I must think of 'em. I'm dying, I know that; and how do I know where I'm going to, or what'll become of me by this time to-morrow?' almost screamed the miserable woman.

'Well, but mother dear, hasn't the parson been and settled that for you? I'm sure he talked with you long enough, and prayed long enough.'

'Ah, child, you don't understand these things. I begin to wish you did. Susy, come here.' This was said with an air of solemnity that startled Susanna; who came and bent her head down in obedience to the pressure of her mother's hand.

'Promise me, Susy, to be a good girl, and go to church regularly, and have no lovers but honest and responsible men who can give you a good home.'

'Oh, I do promise, mother, and I'll take care of myself till I find somebody else to take care of me; and then, you know, I needn't.'

Perhaps this was not the exact kind of answer Susan Beck had required or hoped for. She looked at her daughter as if wanting to say something else, and yet as if loth to give up the last secret in her possession—the one that she had thought more about than all the others put together. But the danger of protracting the disclosure till she could no longer make it weighed with her; and so, with a heavy sigh, she prepared to disburden herself.

‘Susy, darling!’

‘Yes, mother.’

‘You like Guy?’

‘Yes, till I find somebody I may like better.’

‘What would you say if he were a gentleman’s son?’

‘A gentleman’s son!’ repeated Susanna, in great surprise.

‘And heir to large estates?’

Susanna waited to hear no more. With the rapidity of lightning her thoughts ran over all she had heard at different times about Guy’s story, and the death of the other child; and she saw at once

the goal toward which her mother was pointing. She said, almost in a tremble,

‘Mother, dear, you wouldn’t say so, would you, if it were all nonsense? But how do you know it’s true?’

‘I don’t know,’ murmured the dying woman. ‘That’s my greatest grief and trouble. But I believe it, and I have believed it ever since I saw Mrs. Waterman’s face and manner that day at the funeral, when she returned.’

‘Yes, mother dear—quick—speak! But what do you know? Oh, for God’s sake, don’t die until—’

A violent cough, that threatened to carry off the afflicted woman before it ceased, delayed for a long time the explanation that she was wanting to make, and that Susanna was panting to hear. At last Mrs. Beck was just able to whisper above her breath,

‘The workshop—’

‘Stephen’s?’

‘Yes. If I’m right the proof’s there; for she haunts that place, and I’ve never been able to get

into it alone for above a minute or two. But if it's there—'

'I'll find it, mother, dear—trust me!' interrupted Susanna.

'And Susy, dear!'

'Yes, mother.'

'Don't forget that if you want to get over people and make them care for you, you must now and then seem to care a bit for them. You know what I mean. That's your fault, Susy. I speak for your good.'

Susy was not fond of reproof, but this one seemed to strike her as sensible and worth bearing in mind. So she replied with unusual submissiveness,

'Yes, mother, I'll mind; oh, I will, indeed.'

'And if you come to be the Lady of Bran-hape, don't forget it was I—'

Again she was interrupted by the cough, which rapidly turned into convulsions; and when a neighbour, Phœbe Waterman, came in a little while afterwards with some jelly for the sick patient, she saw Mrs. Beck lying still and stark, looking up towards the heaven she had never till recently

thought about, and bearing on her face the aspect of a more terrible mystery and secret than any she had ever intentionally cherished in her bosom.

Had Phœbe not been too much engrossed with the dread sight before her, which called forth all her womanly sympathies, she would probably have noticed how Susanna was occupied before that young lady herself would have been aware of an observer. She was deeply engrossed in examining the treasures of the box in the secret drawer. But Phœbe's exclamations of distress warned her in time ; and so she slid the drawer noiselessly back, and shut down the lid of the chest, and then dropped on a chair, and resigned herself once more to the grief that she had really experienced for a few minutes after her mother's death ; until, indeed, the alluring vision of the box had disturbed the even balance of her mind between the sense of filial duty and the sense of new and unrestrained personal freedom.

Phœbe drew the blinds down over the little diamond-paned windows to shut out the vivid summer sunshine which was bathing with unseemly brilliancy the death-bed of Susan Beck, revealing the many

lines that petty anxieties, selfish cunning, and secretive habits, had left upon her face ; while penetrating cruelly those glassy grey eyes, now powerless to meet and throw it off with their cold gleam, as of old they were wont to meet and throw off the sunshine. So Phœbe, with some difficulty, closed the eyes, and drew down the blinds.

One, however, of those sunbeams which had been prying about Susan Beck as if to find and gloat over in the deserted tenement every token of the sinful inmate which had just departed—one of these sunbeams remained and, as it lay across the room, took in the head of Susanna. She sat on a high three-legged stool beside the bed, stuffing the corner of her scarlet-braided apron first in one eye and then another. Phœbe watched her, and wondered within herself that she had never before noticed, as she did now, the girl's exceeding beauty. She was but thirteen years of age, but might have been, and, indeed, invariably was by strangers, taken for several years older. This was partly on account of her height, for she was already taller than her mother ; but, more especially, for the air

of perfect self-control she always displayed. A dress of pale blue set off the dazzling fairness of her complexion and long curling hair, and gave her an almost aërial appearance.

Moved by her beauty, but more perhaps by the unwonted presence of a tear on her cheek, Phœbe could not help going to the orphan girl and folding her for a moment in her arms; and at that instant there rankled in a corner of her heart, yet true to the unlawful little inmate of the great Dalrymple tomb, a bitter pang, as she thought how much richer than she was Susan Beck in having a child of her own, her very own, to weep her loss.

While Phœbe was stroking Susanna's light hair, and feeling for the first time in her life her warm, loving heart completely turned towards the orphaned girl, there came a knock at the door.

It was Stephen Waterman, who had been home for his lunch, and found the house deserted. Phœbe hastily made known to him the news of Susan's death, and despatched him for certain neighbours who had been intimate with her. When she had closed the door after him and turned round, she

found Susanna had thrown herself across the bed in a fresh burst of grief.

‘Come, Susy,’ she said, comfortingly, ‘don’t give way, there’s a dear. Come home with me! Come, get a few things together, and leave me and the neighbours to set all to rights, and do what’s got to be done.’

Susanna rose with great meekness, and, still holding her apron to one eye, proceeded to follow Phœbe’s directions. She had hardly turned away from the bed before Phœbe noticed that the little gold earrings which Susan always wore, and which she had seen in her ears when she turned to open the door, had disappeared. The wedding-ring, also, was missing from her finger.

‘Susanna!’ she cried out in astonishment, ‘have you taken your mother’s ring and earrings off?’

‘Yes,’ whined Susanna, with her apron to her eye; ‘she’s worn ’em ever since I can remember, and I’ll never part with ’em, never, nor let anybody else touch ’em. She told me to wear the earrings for her sake, and so—so—I will.’

Phœbe was satisfied with this explanation, for the

brief time at least that she had to consider it, for the next minute Mrs. Darkley and the carrier's wife arrived with several neighbours, and immediately got round her, questioning and listening to her with long faces and uplifted hands. Susanna, after receiving some neighbourly condolence from all, continued to follow Phœbe's instructions about getting a few necessaries together, preparatory to leaving the cottage.

Her blue eyes grew larger with a kind of cold excitement as she unlocked drawer after drawer of her mother's hidden miscellaneous treasures. She had been brought up from babyhood with an intense love of finery; but Susan Beck was too sensible a woman to indulge even while she fostered it, and so had taken care to conceal from her daughter the innumerable presents and perquisites she was constantly receiving in her vocation of nurse. Susanna was, however, allowed from time to time a glimpse of the treasures that were some day to be her own,—a glimpse which would raise Susanna in her dreams to such a giddy height that she felt her feet were too good to touch the earth, and

became mad for possession. And now, under the pretence of collecting a few of her own clothes, she could not resist the temptation of looking at and feeling sundry long-coveted trinkets, and opening and examining hurriedly mysterious paper parcels and tiny-boxes. It was indeed a strange assortment of things hoarded away in those old oak drawers; and to Susanna it seemed a hoard of fabulous wealth. She rummaged about with quick, trembling fingers, lighting in succession on a piece of soiled brocade, a little vial of amber-coloured liquid, a spoon-handle of chased silver, a pair of white satin slippers wrapped in a velvet bodice, a baby's coral necklace, a roll of old prints, an odd silk stocking, a piece of old yellow linen of the finest quality, a strip of moth-eaten ermine, a torn valentine with a sickly perfume clinging about it like the ghost of the love and hope it might once have carried, a bridal wreath of faded artificial flowers, a snuff-box without a lid full of differently coloured beads, a powder-puff, a watch, a box of rouge—indeed, Susanna felt that to make a mental inventory of all the contents of those drawers would

take her more days than she now had minutes ; and, besides, Phœbe began to hurry her, for Stephen was waiting. So Susanna drew together the things she needed, made up her bundle and went away with Phœbe to her new home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PHŒBE'S PERPLEXITIES.

AND is this really Phœbe, the woman who nine years ago looked so light-hearted and young, had black glossy hair, an elastic step, a bright beaming eye, a cheerful confident voice, and seemed so strong and self-reliant that no trouble could touch her, except for the passing moment? But now she seems to be getting positively old : her hair is turning grey, she stoops and hesitates as she walks, her eye is dim, her voice low and fitful, and she appears to live and move under the perpetual weight of some secret and irremovable burden. Ah, yes, Phœbe has succeeded in her aim, and this is how she enjoys her success.

The boy is hers, has remained hers unchallenged by anyone ; even Mrs. Beck of late had seemed to have forgotten her early suspicion, if, indeed, she

had ever really thought Phœbe capable of venturing on so bold a scheme. And Phœbe loves the boy more and more dearly ; yes, far better than she loved the babe, because more appreciatingly. In that respect years have left her essentially unchanged. But in all else she is but the wreck of what she was. She has lost all that smartness of person in dress, all that eager activity in mind, all that play of light and shade on her face springing from the vividness of her sensations that formerly characterized her. Nothing now seems to interest her, except the doings of Guy ; and the thoughts he calls forth seem to be those of ceaseless depression.

She has had him well educated, and in the doing this has already expended the money given to her for that purpose by Mrs. Dalrymple. She knows not how to continue the work so well begun, for her husband, poor fellow, shares in her depression of spirit, and sinks year by year into still greater hopelessness of extrication. And, when Phœbe further asks herself how she is to give Guy anything like a fair start in life, she shrinks back in alarm, dreading to encounter the reproaches of her own con-

science. Nor is that her only trouble. She had fancied that a deep and sincere religious motive had originally swayed her when she took her very serious step with regard to Guy; but now, at the close of nine years, she finds, on looking back, that she has not practically tried one single thing calculated to train the boy up as a Catholic; and that her very laxity proves how much she must have deceived herself. It is true that she has been placed in difficult circumstances for the promotion of her own and her mistress's aim. There was no Catholic congregation within many miles of the place; but, then, Phœbe knew well enough that she could, if she had chosen, have easily kept up some kind of spiritual communion with the Church in which she had been born. And she had intended to do so, but there was a great barrier—Phœbe dared not face the confessional. She could not lie there; and she was quite certain that if she told the truth no honest priest would allow her any longer to retain the boy, or keep him in ignorance of his rights. That there were men in holy orders jesuitical enough to be willing to condone the wrong

for a time, in the hope of eventually profiting by the aid of a Catholic gentleman whom the Church should have helped to restore to his estates, might be true; but Phœbe's instincts not only rebelled against that solution of the matter, but, as year after year passed on, and her own religious faith grew dim, and as she saw more and more vividly the chances of some ultimate reunion of the squire and his son, she found it only too easy to let alone the question of Guy's religious culture, and to persuade herself it was best to leave it with Guy himself and with God. Phœbe saw the inconsistency of all this, and it troubled her; but for all that she found it practically impossible to do anything but submit and suffer.

And it is not unworthy of comment the difference in this respect between Phœbe and her mistress. The latter would never have erred by giving way to her womanly love; she did err by giving way to an over-excited religious feeling. But, then, if she had carried her first purpose into effect she would have devoted herself, heart and soul, to the boy's spiritual training; she would never have had a moment's

peace while she could fear she had been remiss in that point, or failed to compensate to the boy in that way for the worldly injury done to him. She was, in a word, good, loving, moral, pious, but had allowed the balance of her powers to be overthrown by excess of zeal for her Church, and so had done things that were opposed to her whole nature. But Phœbe, who was not good, nor moral, nor pious, though with many powerful but irregular impulses urging her to be all these, was loving, but had allowed her love to run loose and to exist without any kind of proper control. And thus love was to her the same source of evil-doing that a too fervid religious feeling had been to her mistress.

The death of Mrs. Beck brought forth all these inward troubles, so habitual with Phœbe, into greater strength. First, because the death itself inexpressibly shocked her. Susan Beck was exactly that one woman in the whole parish of whom till very lately Phœbe would have said, if she had been invited to speak, 'She'll be sure to live to a great age. Why, she's hardly ever been ill.' Secondly, it seemed to remind Phœbe with a most painful

particularity that she, too, was mortal ; and might any day contract such a disease and go off in a week.

But there were other considerations of no slight importance raised by the event. Susan Beck had made Stephen one of the executors to Susanna—the other being the carrier, who was well known as a careful and well-to-do business man, who never allowed a sixpence to pass through his fingers either of his own or other people's money without knowing a very good reason why. And in thus putting Stephen into trust, Mrs. Beck had candidly explained to Phœbe her object. She had said to the latter,

‘I want you to take my girl into your house and to be a guardian to her ; and, in fact, to do for her what Stephen will be supposed to do.’ How could Phœbe refuse such an application? Of course she had at once and warmly assented.

Well, Susanna was now in their house, and was to live with them ; and she and Guy would be thrown very much together. She was already the talk of the village as the most attractive girl in it, though, oddly enough, no one ever seemed to speak

of any other good quality. Phœbe could not forget the remarks that Susan had so often dropped about the future of the two children. Had she, then, any strong objection to the project? Undoubtedly she had. It seemed to throw a new barrier in the path towards that ultimate goal of universal peace and contentment that Phœbe was still weak enough to dream of. She knew that, if ever the day of Guy's recognition came, her own position threatened quite difficulty enough for him and his father, without adding the fact of a humbly-born wife. And, lastly, Phœbe had never been able to entirely get rid of the fear that Mrs. Beck had got some inkling of the truth about Guy's birth, and had therefore done her best to suggest beforehand a marriage between him and Susanna. This very thought of itself gave increased force to Phœbe's dislike of the idea. But what was she now to do?

She determined, after a great deal of cogitation, upon a visit to the squire. While waiting for an opportunity a very curious thing happened soon after Susanna's removal to the house of the Watermans. Whether it was that she was moved by the

sight of Stephen's plodding industry into a kind of wish to imitate him, and thought she ought to learn from him the best way to set to work, or whether it was through some sudden and not unnatural change in her character after her mother's death, which caused Stephen also to get the benefit of her amiability, certain it is that Susanna began to be very fond of hovering about her 'guardian,' accompanying him to the workshop, standing at the door looking in upon him while he worked, sometimes venturing inside (which Stephen rather disliked as it interfered with his movements); talking to him about his affairs, about joinery, about tools, about timber, and especially about the workshop, which grew quite attractive to her as the conversation progressed.

But though Stephen liked this, and felt himself suddenly elevated into a new and very pleasant kind of importance, Phœbe did not; and she more than once interrupted the chat by calling Susanna to the house and employing her in matters that the young lady thought in her secret soul had been carefully invented for the occasion. But while

Susanna graciously obeyed Phœbe's every command, and kept most careful watch over the fierce malignant glances that she knew were struggling to dart forth from her eyes, she always quietly got back to Stephen as soon as she could invent any kind of excuse.

Phœbe grew perplexed and troubled as she noticed this. What did it mean? Had Mrs. Beck, on her death-bed, left to her daughter the knowledge of Phœbe's 'secret?' But how knowledge? What could Susan Beck have known? Was it, then, merely a suspicion,—but one retained so tenaciously that not even the lapse of nine years caused Mrs. Beck to relax her hold of it? And when she could no longer keep watch over it, had she handed the cherished thought to her daughter, that she might track it with renewed zeal under more favourable opportunities, and make her profit out of it?

Of course, the mere dread of such a calamity paralyzed, for a time, Phœbe's inclination to interfere with Susanna's movements. If that young lady only suspected, she might soon grow tired of her

quest, if nothing occurred to stimulate it. It was not likely that a girl of thirteen could do as Mrs. Beck had apparently done—keep the idea ever brooding in her mind and yet allow no outward manifestation of it to escape. Phœbe determined, therefore, to watch in silence for a little time longer before venturing, either by word or act, to risk confirming Susanna in any secret belief that she might be entertaining. But Phœbe was too impulsive to keep to her determination; and when, one day, Susanna, taking up a little work-basket, said she thought she would like to sit by Stephen in the workshop while she mended her stockings, Phœbe burst out with—

‘ You’ll please to do nothing of the kind ; d’ye think my time’s to be always taken up with running to and fro to fetch you ? I forbid you to go any more to the workshop, except when I send you. Now, you mind that ! I won’t allow it ! Do you hear me ? ’

‘ Yes, please, Mrs. Waterman, ’ was all Susanna replied. But this little bit of dialogue carried Susanna’s thoughts back to her mother’s bedside,

and she could not help thinking what a clever woman her mother was to have found out about the workshop without ever seeing anything; for now Susanna felt sure her mother was right.

‘When are you going to the squire’s?’ asked Susanna, after a pause,

‘Don’t know,’ curtly answered Phœbe, who had been intending to go that very afternoon, but felt her intention die out as she thought of leaving Susanna alone with Stephen and the workshop.

‘I thought I should like,’ continued Susanna, ‘to spend the afternoon and evening with Mrs. Darkley, who has asked me to tea any day that I like to go. But I know you wouldn’t like me to be away from home the same time as you. That’s why I asked if you were going to the squire’s.’

Phœbe paused, and thought for a moment. Presently she said—

‘Oh! I don’t mind your being out when I know where you are, and when I know Stephen doesn’t need one of us to stay at home; so we’ll both go. Mind you don’t be late. I shan’t.’

‘O no! I’m so glad. I may go directly, then?’

Phœbe waited to see her depart. But even when she was gone she could not shake off the feeling of vague alarm that possessed her. She went towards the workshop. Stephen was there alone, hard at work. Phœbe glanced at the spot where the packet lay concealed; no hand had touched the bricks, that was quite certain. They remained as Phœbe herself had left them on that memorable day. Foreseeing the importance of knowing whether anyone ever discovered her hiding-place, Phœbe had studied minutely every little feature of the surface, and imprinted it so strongly on her mind that she was quite sure that it would be impossible to remove either of the bricks without some change that she would understand. But as she looked now with intense anxiety, she quite satisfied herself that no one had touched the spot.

Still she could not go away to fulfil her purposed visit to the Hall. Some undefinable instinct seemed to warn her to remain on the watch. So she chatted with Stephen, went to the house, came back again to fetch him to tea, hurried off alone before tea was over to the workshop again, to find

it undisturbed by any inquisitive step, and so by the time she had convinced herself it was too late to go to the Hall, she had also convinced herself she had very foolishly frightened herself about Susanna.

Stephen did not work late that evening, but as soon as it began to get dark he put down his tools, pulled out his pipe and lighted it, and then sat for a few minutes looking round upon his domain and upon his bit of work on the bench with a sigh that seemed at once to express his trouble at his making so little out of so nice a place, and to give him a feeling of relief afterwards. When his pipe was exhausted he — after having knocked out the ashes on his bench—put it in his pocket, and went in to supper. Susanna had not yet returned; but Phœbe knew her habits, and did not expect her for an hour or two. And so they sat and talked over their troubles; and Stephen suggested, and in so doing made Phœbe's eyes blaze with the old fire, that they should sell Guy's watch, the one that the squire had given to him.

‘You know,’ said Stephen, ‘I wouldn't ha’

thought on it if I know'd else what to do. 'Though I never wore a gold watch myself, I'd be proud to see Guy a-wearing one; but victuals is hard to go without, and I'm afeard we're a-coming to that.'

'I'd go and work along with them drabs at the market-garden first—ay, and make him work too—before I'd part with the squire's gift. All Guy's good luck would go with it.'

'Well, Phœbe, you wouldn't like to go on the parish now, would you?'

Phœbe bade him, indignantly, hold his tongue, if he'd got nothing more sensible to say; but the talk made her regret the delay of her visit to the Hall, and thinking of that brought back the idea of the workshop and of Susanna. She got up from the supper-table with its hard scraps of bread, and its musty scraps of meat that neither of them could eat, and went out. What is that she sees? Yes, surely there is a gleam in the workshop. There is some one inside.

'Is it Susanna?' she asks herself.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LIGHT IN THE WORKSHOP.

SUSANNA enjoyed the teacakes that Mrs. Darkley set down before her with her usual zest, and she was still more delighted with the marks of respect towards the 'heiress' that accompanied them; for the knowledge of Susanna's fortune had rapidly made the tour of the place. But somehow, when she had done justice to these delicacies, bodily and mental, she began to fidget about the clock in a manner that puzzled Mrs. Darkley, who knew that she had had on more than one previous occasion to give Susanna a hint that it was time to go, before the idea of going was at all accepted by that young lady. She sought to amuse her by getting Joshua to teach her to play at draughts; but Joshua soon gave up the unprofitable attempt. At last Susanna said, with one of her sweetest smiles,

‘Mrs. Waterman asked me to be home early this evening, so I think I’d better go.’

Mrs. Darkley made no further objection, though she looked at her husband as though to say, ‘What’s she after now?’ And he answered by thrusting up his lower jaw contemptuously, in signification that he had long learned to judge women and girls as beings about whose motives it was equally absurd and unprofitable to speculate.

But they were both touched by the girl’s grace and beauty, and by her deference to them, the last quality having been so unusual with her previously; and they alike attributed it to a change in her character, perhaps through the loss of her mother, perhaps through her beginning to feel more womanly.

But Susanna, with just one mocking laugh in remembrance of them after she had quitted the house, began to trip along gaily, breaking at times almost into a run as she made her way homeward through the fields and along the road. But as she drew towards the house of the Watermans she turned off the road into a field, though it was now

so dark that she could not see anything distinctly far before her, nor be herself seen. Had Phœbe witnessed that departure from the road she would have known what it meant, for it was the precise way that she herself had gone so many years before to the workshop when she wanted to enter it unseen.

And Susanna did go direct to the workshop ; and though she had no occasion to fear being watched from the house, and therefore went to the front door, it was with a certain guardedness of manner, implying a wish to be quite sure Stephen had gone away. Satisfied on that point, she unfastened the door, which was often left unlocked, and went in. Of course she could see nothing clearly ; but she went feeling about with a kind of catlike softness of step and accuracy of feeling that kept her from hurting herself either by contact with the bench or the old planks of timber lying about, or with the tools that she came upon ; though once she started as she touched the cold flat steel of the blade or chisel which Stephen had taken out of his plane to sharpen, and left it lying on the bench. What could she be seeking ? She was not so childish as to suppose she would make any disco-

very that way ; but she knew what she was about. After a long hunt in the dark, there was heard the click—click—click of the flint-and-steel apparatus which Stephen kept in the workshop in case he should need a light. Either the tinder was bad, or the hands were too impatient, for suddenly there was a little cry of rage and pain, and then a pause, and then a renewal of the click—click—click. Sparks at last ; yes, and now a light, for Susanna has got with her a bit of coloured wax taper, that she found among her mother's stores, and which she had put in her pocket, pleased with its colour, and possibly with some half notion it might be useful. Who shall say how and when it had been used by her mother ? Or what mysterious influences derived from that former time still hung about it and invested it with attraction for the daughter whose character had so much resemblance to Susan Beck's ?

Susanna, holding the taper aloft in her right hand, began to peer about. She looked towards the roof, but could see nothing distinctly till she got upon the bench. Then she satisfied herself there could be nothing concealed there. The tiles were

all perfectly regular, though broken and mended ; but there was the beam which ran across. It was just wide enough for something to be deposited on the top. Susanna could reach its upper surface. She passed her hand along it in spite of the thick black dust that lay there until she had gone from end to end. Then, with a gesture of vexation and a look of spite that strangely deformed the fair girlish features, she got down and began to look all over the wall. She was soon aware that to do this thoroughly would take more time than she could be sure of just now ; and besides, she was but a girl, and she was getting tired of her freak ; so she quitted the wall and began to pore among the shavings and under the bench, and behind the planks, her hands getting every instant more and more foul, her eyes more angry, and her gestures more fretful. She said to herself,

‘ I will find it if there is anything—that I will, if I come a hundred times ! My mother was a clever woman, and she knew she was right when she told me.’

Just then, forgetting her caution in her fretfulness,

she put down the taper on the floor, turned to look at something that had attracted her attention, swept with her dress some of the loose shavings towards the light, and in an instant there was a blaze.

Susanna screamed and thought her last hour had come. And, doubtless, if she had really been alone, she and the workshop would have perished together ; but some one was without who watched—who rushed in breathlessly at the sight of the fire, and merely saying hoarsely,

‘ Out of the place—out with you ! ’ snatched up an old sack from a corner, dropped it upon the burning shavings, and stamped upon it and upon the fiery bits that escaped beyond its edges till all danger was removed.

Susanna stood for a moment at the door like one fascinated, thinking of running to the house, thinking even of running away altogether, to escape Phœbe, but unable to determine what she would do, and looking so white with fear that her complexion seemed something unearthly in its beauty.

‘ Come here ! ’ said Phœbe, slowly.

Susanna trembled, but obeyed, and recrossed the threshold of the workshop.

‘What’s the meaning of this?’

Susanna again trembled and looked about as if in despair of an answer, till she saw, by the light of the taper on the bench, the little heap of ashes from Stephen’s pipe; and at once she said, speaking very fast,

‘I was just coming home when I saw a light in the workshop, and I thought Mr. Waterman was there, and he wasn’t; but as soon as I opened the door there was a great blaze—yes—and Stephen—Mr. Waterman—must have dropped a spark from his pipe, and I was so frightened.’

‘You’re telling me a lie, you know you are, and it must be for a bad purpose,’ said Phœbe, trying to preserve an air of authority and to conceal her own inner anguish; but, before she could say any more, she suddenly finished the business by seizing the girl, and giving her a few hearty blows, which were interrupted on the one side by appeals—

‘Oh, oh! forgive me, and I’ll never come here again;’ and by the reiteration of the same question on the other,

‘ You’ll mind me next time, will you ? ’

Quivering with fear and pain—for it was the first time in her life that Susanna had been subjected to such treatment—she glided away in the dark to the house, and up to her chamber, where she undressed and looked at her bruises, and actually bit her own arm in one place to increase the apparent injury, and shook it threateningly at Phœbe in the direction of the workshop. Then she went to bed to dream of future vengeance, and of the golden fruits that her imagination painted as hanging ready for her in the path of life.

But Phœbe, after her first burst of alarm and anger, was oppressed with shame, grief, and despair. To beat the child of her neighbour—the child of the dead woman—the child that was so beautiful, and that so loved Guy ! She felt sick of herself, sick of all her past hopes, sick of life ; she dropped one arm wearily on the bench, and leaned there with drooping head, as though she wished she could thus sink into the grave.

But she was roused by a call without of—

‘ Mother ! Mother ! ’

CHAPTER XX.

A YOUNG WARRIOR FROM HIS FIRST BATTLE FIELD.

WHEN Phœbe heard the voice crying ‘Mother! mother!’ she sprang up in an instant, her whole manner changed, and she came to the door of the workshop with a feeling almost akin to joy.

‘Guy, darling, is it thee?’

‘Yes, mother, it’s me,’ answered the boy, whose face could scarcely be distinguished through the gloom of the night. Phœbe, without another word, dropped on her knees on the sward, so as the better to clasp him in her arms, and she broke out into a great fit of weeping, as she exclaimed,

‘Oh, Guy, Guy, Guy!’

Although the lad must have been quite unable to understand her, his mother’s conduct did not seem very much to surprise him, for he said,

‘It’s nothing, mother! Don’t cry about it; it’ll all wash off.’

‘What, what,’ asked Phœbe, in sudden alarm, ‘what’s the matter?’ and without waiting for an answer she began to peer into his face, and to feel over his head with her hands, but started, with a half-suppressed scream, as she found her fingers wet. ‘Is it blood?’ she gasped, fearfully.

‘Yes, mother,’ said Guy, laughing, ‘but it don’t matter.’ But Phœbe began to hurry him along towards the house, asking him all sorts of questions as she went, and growing the more agitated as she observed that, for some cause or other, the boy did not care to say any more than he could help.

‘The master gave me a holiday to come home and see you, and—and—I got fighting with a boy on the road, that’s all, mother.’

It was well for that boy he was not just then in Phœbe’s immediate neighbourhood. Whether his cause had been good or bad would have made little difference to Phœbe: the knowledge that he had dared to touch Guy was enough to rouse her to frenzy. Knowing not what else to say or whom else to attack, she presently began to rate Guy for his misconduct.

‘How dare you fight anyone?’ she asked.

‘How dare I? Would you have me be a coward then?’

‘Well, but see what you’ve got by it, sir; the other boy’s beat you, and a pretty, pretty state you’re in.’

‘Oh, has he? I reckon he doesn’t think he has, mother, he was blind as a bat, and I had to take him home; but it’s all right now, and we’re friends.’

‘Who was it?’

‘Billy Gage!’

‘What! the carrier’s son? Why, he’s almost twice as big as you!’

‘Well, mother, he couldn’t help that, you know.’

Though Phœbe couldn’t quite understand Guy’s logic, somehow her heart swelled with pride; and, when she tried to warn him against fighting any more, all she could say was,

‘Don’t. For my sake, Guy, don’t. There’s a brave, brave boy!’ and she dwelled fondly on the last words. And then Guy knew he was forgiven. And mother and son kissed one another with a

heartiness of affection that was at once touching and beautiful.

By this time they had got into the house, and Guy had been brought before the light to let his hurts be made known. There was an ugly gash across the head, and Phœbe shuddered as she beheld it.

‘ Why, Guy, Billy couldn’t ha’ done this with his fists ? ’

Guy made no answer. He knew it had been a foul blow, made with a closed knife that Billy Gage had in his hand when he struck the first time ; but as Billy had ultimately said he had struck without thinking of the knife, Guy didn’t care to expose his late enemy to the indignant vengeance of his mother. So, when Phœbe looked at him for an answer, she saw his eyes were turned another way ; and, following the direction of their glance, Phœbe noticed that Susanna was standing there, at the foot of the staircase, in her night dress, over which she had hastily thrown an Indian shawl, while carrying in one hand the twisted red wax taper (which she had again lighted for amusement while playing the lady

upstairs) ; the shawl, like the taper, being, as Phœbe guessed, from her mother's stores. She looked so very lovely, with her long curling hair falling loosely in picturesque disorder about her neck, that Phœbe and Guy were alike struck with the spectacle.

Not that Guy and Susanna were any great friends at present. She was accustomed to make the boy a kind of butt at one time, and then at another to turn him into a pet or toy, in which not succeeding, the two would generally quarrel and part. But, whether it was the secret belief that animated Susanna to-night that the boy she saw standing there in such sorry plight was the heir to the vast Dalrymple estates, or whether it was that her heart was really moved with pity as she looked on his unnaturally pale face and wet hair all dark and clotted with blood, certain it is she looked a very angel of sweetness as she advanced and put down her little taper, and began to busy herself with great alacrity in waiting upon Phœbe, and bringing to her whatever she was most likely to want.

‘Poor fellow ! I am so sorry ! Here's the vinegar, Mrs. Waterman. I'd best now bring some

water to wash his face. Would he like a drink? Poor Guy! I'm so glad I wasn't asleep.'

Guy listened and watched, but with no very gracious return for Susanna's kind words or kind doings. And when she offered to touch him he put her back and would only let Phœbe officiate. But Susanna smiled, and persisted in doing whatever she could. And as Phœbe cut away the tangled and bedabbled locks with her scissors, and bathed the wound, Susanna got ready a piece of sticking-plaster, and would have clapped it upon the place, after duly breathing upon it and snipping the edges to make them stick, and showing she knew how to do it all in the best manner, but that Guy again, with marked rudeness, pushed back her hand, saying—

'Do be quiet and let me alone, can't you? You're not so fond of meddling generally. Let mother put it on.'

This certainly was unkindly said, and Susanna seemed to feel it very much. She turned away and wiped her eyes.

By the time Phœbe had finished the whole

business of repairing, washing, and freshening the bruised, dirty, and jaded warrior, Guy had not only recovered his ordinary appearance, but seemed to be also reverting to his usually placid temper. He now stood there in the parlour, showing to Phœbe's fond eyes a tall, bright-faced, sun-burnt lad, with rich brown eyes full of eloquent expression. Phœbe, as she tied a new black ribbon round his neck, could not help holding him there for a moment that she might feast her sight with his beauty, which was so thoroughly the right kind of beauty for a lad, as suggesting, not prettiness, or elegance, or delicacy, but dawning manliness, strength, frankness, brusqueness, not unmingled with a certain shyness of manner that implied reserve of mind, and an innate grace or refinement of body. The 'gentleman' that Phœbe coveted so much to see, and for which she had made so many sacrifices, was developing there, plain enough though latent; but there was a something still higher also slowly growing up—the *man*, with all his varied powers, at once rich and harmonious, and being moulded under the control of a will and a conscience that promised one

day to exhibit a truly noble character whatever might be his position in life.

Phœbe could not resist kissing him again and again ; and, though he coloured a little under the infliction, still it was plain enough the lad returned the love that was so poured forth upon him. But when Susanna, who had again come to the side of Phœbe, seemed to be so very deeply impressed with the nature of the scene that she, too, would have shared in it by also caressing the hero of the late fight, he very contemptuously dismissed her pretensions by the remark,

‘Ain’t you going to bed? It’s quite time for girls like you to be there. Come, be off!’

Susanna replied by bursting into tears, which she did not this time attempt to hide or to dry up. Presently she sobbed out,

‘You’re an unfeeling, good-for-nothing boy, that you are ; and I’ll never care for you any more. I know you don’t care for me.’

Guy looked, and, whether it was that the tears added a new and irresistible charm to Susanna’s face, or that he had all along been only partly

representing his true self, we won't undertake to say, but after a good long look at her, he said,

'Don't I?'

'No; you know you don't.'

'Oh, and I suppose it wasn't for you I pitched into Billy Gage?'

'Billy Gage! Me!' 'Susanna's eyes did now indeed open wide, for she was really astonished, and did not need to try to appear so.

'Yes,' said Guy; 'he said things about you he'd no business to say, and I pitched into him. There, now, will you go to bed? I didn't mean to tell you or anybody, but you wouldn't let me alone.'

Susanna's first thought was of wonder what that great, big, impudent Billy Gage could have been saying about her; her next, that it was possibly something that it might be as well to leave unrepeat- ed, for what if it should be both unpleasant and true? But the first thing that her thoughts caused her to do was to fall upon Guy's neck before he was aware of her purpose, and cry as she kissed his round cheek with seemingly grateful emotion,

‘Oh, Guy, you are indeed a noble fellow! Did you really fight him for me? And was he very much hurt? Oh, I’ll never speak to you unkindly any more; I won’t indeed.’

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. PAMPLE'S COUSIN.

PHŒBE had not been a careless observer of the scene between Guy and Susanna, and it only caused her to revert with increased anxiety to the idea of her visit to Mr. Dalrymple. She had got, as we have already intimated, some new fancy into her head, and, although she was not very sure of its value, she could not get rid of it; and the constant recurrence of the same thought did for her what it does for so many of us—produce a kind of conviction it must be right.

Phœbe did not like this new attitude of Susanna, even while she could not help admiring the girl, and while she was obliged to acknowledge that Guy's unexpected defence of her gave a worthy motive for the change. But was the alleged the real motive? Or was Susanna only showing in this

way what Phœbe feared she had already exhibited by her pertinacious haunting of the workshop, that she guessed something about Guy's birth? And whenever Phœbe allowed herself thus to get suspicious she was sure to be wanting to do something to render it difficult, if not impossible, that Guy and Susanna should ever be more to each other as man and woman than they now were as boy and girl. Phœbe was quick enough to perceive the many advantages that Susanna possessed for ensuring success in her aim—if, indeed, she had such an aim—in her beauty, her money, and in her superior age, which made it possible she would obtain a decisive influence over Guy if he once fell under her influence.

She determined she would go to the Hall the next day and try the worth of her scheme.

But could she leave Susanna? Would she not repeat her search in the workshop? Phœbe thought she would not. Susanna was not (at present at least) possessed of that quality which her mother undoubtedly could lay claim to—courage. Phœbe felt tolerably sure that for some time to come the beating had done one good thing—frightened

Susanna too much to incline her to risk a repetition.

And so, early next morning, Phœbe, having stopped Guy from going off with Stephen to do a little job at a farmer's house in the neighbourhood, and having deposited Susanna knee-deep among the things she had turned out of her mother's boxes, set off with the lad to revisit Branhapp^e Hall for the first time since the period of the death of Mrs. Dalrymple, when Phœbe at her return from the ill-starred expedition had brought to the bereaved husband the actual confirmation of the news he had previously only vaguely known.

As they went through the village a gig passed them, containing a lady and gentleman—the former, a woman of striking though rather matronly beauty; and the other being no other than Mr. Pample, the steward.

He was so eagerly engaged in talk with the lady, whose heightened colour seemed also to imply much interest in the conversation, that Phœbe could not but wonder who she was and whither they were going. She began to have an uneasy impres-

sion that something was going to happen at the Hall that would be fatal to her own project. But of course she could understand little from mere looks.

The lady was handsome—was going towards the Hall in the care of the steward. Was it possible that Phœbe beheld the opening of a new game in which it was designed that Mr. Dalrymple should unconsciously play his part?

While Phœbe vainly racks her brains to solve the problem thus unexpectedly presented, and while she answers Guy's continual questions about every object they pass that strike him as at all strange or fresh, let us explain on what business Mr. Pample and his companion are going to Branhape. To do this, suppose we take up and string together little bits of the talk that has been going on for the last half-hour, ever since, indeed, the lady got down from the coach and ascended into the gig which Mr. Pample had ready for her. These passages of their conversation were from time to time interrupted by more commonplace matters (which we pass over), especially by questions from the lady which showed that she, at least, had no particular object in view

that demanded either cautious language or mental reserve.

‘Well, cousin,’ observed the lady, as she took her seat in the gig, and allowed Mr. Pample to fasten the apron carefully over her knees and her rich black silk dress; ‘well, cousin, you see I took your advice, and came exact to your^d time, and I hope everything will turn out pleasantly. But, really, do you know that I never thought I could have been induced to give up my dear little cottage by the seaside, and to go out into the world again at the age of forty?’

‘Forty!’ echoed Mr. Pample with well-feigned astonishment.

‘Forty! not a year less,’ repeated Mrs Hammett with a hearty laugh that contrasted strongly with the smile that Mr. Pample alone indulged in. He was one of those gentlemen who smile often—laugh never. ‘It’s true,’ she observed, ‘my income is small enough, but then I can just live upon it; and, upon my word, I don’t see even now why I should have determined to come out into the world to play the housekeeper to a country squire. Do you?’

And Mrs. Hammett looked at Mr. Pample with such real, simple interest in the answer, and yet with so much of contentment in the result, whatever it might be, and with such handsome, white teeth revealed through the rosy lips, and with such glowing summer tints in her well-formed features, that Mr. Pample began for an instant to falter in his reply as a new contingency opened upon him. But, whatever it was, he seemed to give it up with a sigh when he said to her,

‘Yes, cousin, I thought it for the best, or I would not have written to you, and I still think the same.’

‘Do you? Well, that’s satisfactory. Come, then, tell me all about him, and what you think I ought to know, and so on.’

‘First, let me tell you that I think so handsome a woman as my cousin—’

‘Lord, George! do you think me handsome?’ asked Mrs. Hammett, with the same overflowing good-humour and animal spirits that marked all her sallies, but also with a little blush that Mr. Pample was pleased to see.

‘ You are, if you want to know the truth, really younger-looking and altogether more beautiful than when I saw you last, some five years ago.’

‘ Well, but I suppose it’s not my beauty that brings me here ; so go on.’

Mr. Pample coughed and turned aside (his practice when he wanted to snatch extra time for a delicate answer), and then seemed to go on just where he had before left off.

‘ Yes, as I was saying, I think that so handsome a woman as you are was born for something better than cultivating flowers and tea-drinking old ladies at the seaside.’

‘ Well, cousin, I might have been born for a better position, as you say, but I have been a long while getting at it—now, haven’t I?’

Mr. Pample hated to be interrupted, and the smile that greeted Mrs. Hammett’s remark was just a shade less sweet than usual. But he went on with the patience of a martyr.

‘ Yes. I think, too, that so accomplished a woman—’

‘ Lord, George ! am I accomplished ?

‘D— it, no!’ would probably have been Mr. Pample’s honest expression of rage—we won’t say opinion—if he had given way to it; but what he did say was,

‘My dear cousin, you know—and you have had reason to know—that I think you altogether a most charming person.’

Well, that was true. Mrs. Hammett did know that many years back, when the choice was offered her between two rival aspirants for her favour, Mr. Pample was the one she did not select as her husband.

Presently Mr. Pample continued—‘Now, then, permit me, without inter— that is, allow me, my dear cousin, to tell you why it was that I advised you so strongly to come here and break up your little home, where your poor husband left you so comfortably so long ago?’

‘Yes, do; that’s just what I want to know.’

‘Very well, then. First, you must know that the squire is wifeless and childless. He lost both a few years ago through a mad freak of his lady, who, being a Catholic, wished to train the boy as a

Catholic, and, as he wouldn't consent, she surreptitiously took him away.'

'Dear me!' ejaculated Mrs. Hammett, with true womanly sympathy in her tones for all the trouble she saw involved for both parties.

'Yes, and I went after them; and found the child dead on the deck of the vessel, and the very next day there was a great storm, and the squire's lady went down in it to the bottom of the sea with the wreck of the ship.'

'O dear! O dear! That was indeed swift punishment on the poor lady's wrong-doing.'

'Since then the squire has led a miserable life. He used to hunt regularly, and had a pack of the finest hounds in the county; but he sold them off, and now he scarcely stirs from the Hall.'

'And he has no other child, you say?'

'No; and you may think what it is for an old and proud family like his to be coming thus to its end. 'Tis that that preys upon him, I think. I don't mean that he didn't very much miss his lady, but still he'd have got over that loss in time if anything else had been left him to live for.'

‘Poor dear gentleman!’ said Mrs. Hammett, and the tears were standing in her large soft blue eyes.

‘Well,’ continued Mr. Pample, ‘I have been trying to persuade him to marry, but he peremptorily forbids the subject even to be discussed. Since then it occurred to me that if, under the name and notion of a superior kind of housekeeper, I could introduce to the Hall some ladylike person of superior mind and character, he might get used to her society, and so cease to dwell perpetually on his troubles. A mere housekeeper wouldn’t do. We already have at the Hall a very decent and clever woman who fulfils the routine duties of such a department; but what I want for him is a woman of good sense and agreeable manners, who can preside at his table on ordinary occasions, talk with him, interest him, and yet not presume so far on her success (if she were successful) as to forget she is not his guest or relative, but only his housekeeper.’

‘Well, George, I thank you for speaking so candidly; and I think I can do what you wish, if he

receives me at all kindly ; if not, I go back pretty soon. Poor dear gentleman, I am sure I shall be only too glad if I can be of service to him.'

'Yes, cousin, that's right. Only don't forget—for I obtained his consent to the arrangement with difficulty—that you mustn't seem to pity him, or scarcely even to know anything about him that calls for pity, or you'll settle him at once.'

'Oh, never fear! I shall respect him too much for that. He must be no ordinary man to mourn so long for his wife and child.'

'Yes, but it's quite time to forget them now. And I fancy he looks with interest for your arrival; he has seemed so much more cheerful during the last few days. So, if *you* can work a cure here, I, for my part shall be only too glad, for the sake of all parties.'

Had Mr. Pample any special meaning hidden beneath these words? Mrs. Hammett could not but notice the peculiar tone and the winning smile that accompanied them. Her face flushed, she grew hot and uncomfortable, as she said,

'I hope, George, you don't think me so silly as

to come here with any other notion than the one you yourself gave me?’

‘No, no, of course not,’ responded Mr. Pample, while his eyes seem to rest inquisitively on Mrs. Hammett’s. ‘But, at the same time, if the lord of the manor of Branhape were to fall in love with my handsome cousin, and offer her marriage, I can promise you I should discover no impediment. Only I hope that if such an event ever does come to pass, she won’t become too grand a lady to remember her poor kinsman.’ This was said with a mock-serious air, and altogether with so much apparent sincerity of meaninglessness—beyond the personal good feeling implied—that Mrs. Hammett laughed again, a right down honest enjoyable laugh it was, too, as she said,

‘Oh, depend upon me, and upon my favour, if ever I become the lady of Branhape.’

‘Well, you have your chance,’ gaily said Mr. Pample.

‘Who is that woman there looking after us?’ suddenly asked Mrs. Hammett; ‘the woman, I mean, with that fine boy by her side?’

....

‘Uncommonly odd,’ muttered Mr. Pample. ‘Why, that is the very woman who nursed the squire’s boy, and took him secretly away from the village to join her mistress at the seaport where they were to embark. She it was who brought home the decisive news of my lady’s death, for she saw the last of her upon the wreck.’

‘And the boy?’

‘Is her own child. He was born within a few days of the squire’s, and he, too, was taken on that mad expedition; for Phœbe—’

‘Phœbe?’ interrupted Mrs. Hammett.

‘Yes, Phœbe Waterman, that is her name. She would not leave her own boy at home, and so the young chap there went with them, Phœbe suckling both, but having some one with her to assist.’

‘And he lived while the squire’s boy died?’

‘Yes, and it was odd, but when I got upon the deck of the ship—the “Black Gull” they called it, I think—and when I saw a dead child there about to be buried, and another living one in the nurse’s arms, I could not help thinking what a convenient

tale it might be to get up suddenly, supposing it had been the nurse's boy that had died. Mrs. Dalrymple, you see, would not want to quarrel with her husband's messenger, and would only be too glad to have escaped further difficulty for the time.'

'But, bless me! you don't mean you had any real doubt?'

'No; not after I had seen the face of the nurse, who was evidently quite taken up with the babe she held rather than thinking of, or weeping for, the babe that was dead; not after I had seen and touched the lace-edged clothes under the winding-sheet. They hardly knew of my coming till I appeared on the deck, and could not, I think, have so hastily undone and replaced the funereal garb, besides changing the two children's dresses. Then, again, if she had been the mother, she would never have allowed me so readily to carry away her child; why should she? While, of course, it was right and natural for Mrs. Dalrymple to send back hers to the squire, when I asked for him.'

'But I suppose you know since then for a

certainly that it *was* the squire's son who died, and not that woman's?'

'Why, my dear cousin, I suppose nobody in the village ever doubted it for an instant. I am sure I didn't. Why should the poor woman wish to burden herself with a child for life that didn't belong to her, instead of taking him home to his rich father, who would have been only too glad to have handsomely rewarded her?'

'There was never any bad feeling talked of on the part of this woman against either her mistress or the squire?'

'On the contrary, she and Mrs. Dalrymple were greatly attached to each other; and as for the squire, he was always liberal and friendly to Phœbe for his wife's sake.'

'Oh, of course, it's all clear enough; but I couldn't for the moment help fancying what a position it would have been for that boy all through his life if there had been any doubt as to his birth under these circumstances.'

'No doubt, whatever, I assure you. So much is that the case, that I had myself almost forgotten

the very existence of this lad of Phœbe's till you drew my attention to him. He seems a fine boy. Here we are at the Hall. Don't forget, my dear cousin, one thing in dealing with Mr. Dalrymple. Expect nothing, and there's no saying how much may not come to you.'

The wheels of the gig now creaked on the newly-laid gravel in front of the entrance-porch of Bran-hape ; and Mr. Pample, leaping out, gave his hand to Mrs. Hammett, and conducted her into the house.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH THE SQUIRE UPSETS EVERYBODY'S
PLANS.

WHATEVER the motives that actuated Mr. Pam-
ple (and certainly we have seen no reason to doubt
that he explained them accurately to Mrs. Ham-
met), the policy he recommended was followed
by instant success. No one who might have looked
in upon Mr. Dalrymple in his study a few weeks
before the arrival of his new housekeeper, and then
have seen the same gentleman a few hours after
that event, could have doubted but that some signal
and most exhilarating turn of fortune had hap-
pened. The change was wonderful in its amount,
though not at all wonderful as to its philosophy.
The mind of the unhappy gentleman had become
so habituated to the same ceaseless daily recur-
rence of melancholy thoughts that it was easier to

go on as he was than make any great improvement at the cost of an effort that could only be suggested by a sense of duty, or by a felt necessity of throwing off the burden that weighed down his spirits, or, lastly, by a hope that was at once sufficiently strong and attractive to draw him out of his gloom. But for years past all these motives had been wanting. Mr. Dalrymple did his duty to the Church, to the poor, and to his tenantry, and was (as Mr. Pample found) still an accurate man of business; but, having fulfilled these responsibilities, he acknowledged no others as incumbent upon him. As to his animal spirits, they had altogether disappeared. He would listen with his old enthusiasm to the cry of a pack on some breezy morning; but the occasions were few on which he could be again tempted to join the brother sportsmen among whom at one period he had spent so large a part of his time and income. And hope? Why, he had none, unless it were to drop peacefully but speedily into the vault of his ancestors, and so bring to a close a life that seemed to him to have been so useless.

But for some little time before Mrs. Hammett's arrival a great change had been noticed. And when she had been but an hour or two at Branhape, the squire's laugh was heard once more echoing through the vaulted corridor as he took that lady to see certain parts of her future dominion. She was puzzled, and couldn't resist feeling a little flattered. Surely it was not her appearance that had been so powerful with him, though he was at first much struck with her; and he had felt confused and begun to ask himself what Mr. Pample meant by bringing such a woman there. But when they had fairly got into chat he had found something about her which pleased and attracted him. She seemed at once so simple and yet so wise; so frank and outspoken, and yet so fond of the little innocent coquetries of the sex; and then her smile was so catching and her mirth so irresistible. Altogether the squire appeared to have put on suddenly a new character; and, if it was not owing to Mrs. Hammett's presence, what was it that so transformed him? And, whatever secret thought might be in the squire's mind, it is certain that he

looked upon Mrs. Hammett as a new and agreeable inmate of his house, whom he was heartily glad to welcome.

Mr. Pample was present most of the time, and smiled again and again his very sweetest upon both the cheerful faces before him, and rubbed his hands gently as though they were slightly cold, but really to express to himself the abundance of his inner satisfaction with his policy.

They were all three at lunch in the stately dining-room when Phœbe and Guy arrived, and there the two dusty wayfarers found the squire and the lady and gentleman they had seen in the gig.

‘Come in, Phœbe—come in,’ cried the loud voice of the squire, as a man servant entered and stood looking back over the threshold. ‘Oh, you’ve the boy there, have you? That’s right. I haven’t seen him a long time. And how are you? Why, you look sadly altered! What’s been the matter?’

Phœbe looked at Mr. Pample and Mrs. Hammett, and curtsied, but was silent.

‘Oh, speak out! You needn’t mind my friends

here. Take a glass of wine; t'will do you good.' Phœbe came near, took the glass, curtsied before drinking to Mr. Dalrymple and Mr. Pample, looked at Mrs. Hammett but did not curtsy to her, and then drank it off.

Guy meanwhile, who had been quietly taking a look at the statues and pictures of the room, just glanced at Mr. Pample (who nodded to him), and at Mrs. Hammett (who smiled), and then fixed his eye on the squire, and from that time continued to observe him.

'And so, Guy, you've come to see your godfather at last—eh? Why, you've grown so fine a lad I shouldn't wonder if you didn't mean to be a man some day.'

'Of course I shall be a man, sir,' said Guy, looking in the squire's face with his bright fearless gaze.

'I wonder whether I can find a guinea for you?' and the squire began to search in his pocket.

'I don't want it, sir,' said Guy.

'For shame, Guy!' interposed Phœbe; 'you mustn't speak that way to the squire.'

‘Mustn’t I? Why not?’ asked Guy.

‘Ay, come, Phœbe, tell us that,’ said the squire, laughing. ‘I think he has puzzled you there. And so you don’t want my guinea?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Well, what do you want? Speak out. You’re no boy if you don’t want something.’

Guy looked round the room wistfully, and then said,

‘Please may I look at the pictures?’

‘Of course you may. Go where you like, and look at them all.’ Guy waited for no further permission, but at once, without either thanking the squire or taking any notice of him, went towards the walls, and forgot all about place, or rank, or people, in his absorbing delight in examining at his pleasure the coloured glories that he saw all around, and especially a battle-piece at the end of the room that showed where one of the Dalrymple family had helped to make the history of his country.

Guy thus disposed of, Mr. Dalrymple came and sat near Phœbe, so that, if she wanted to say aught

privately to him, she might do so. Again he noticed her worn, sad look, and asked her what was the matter.

Phœbe sighed in answer, and said, 'And you, too, sir, seem to be much changed.'

'Well, yes, I suppose so,' slowly remarked Mr. Dalrymple; and the gloom so recently departing seemed all coming back in connection with this reminder of his sufferings, and under the influence of the vivid past which Phœbe's presence and sadness of demeanour began to call up.

'Please to forgive me—presuming to speak or to offer advice to one like you, sir.'

'Oh pray speak, and fearlessly.'

'Well, sir, I have often thought you ought to have some one to love and care for, and——' Here Phœbe found her powers of eloquence break down, and she looked round for Guy.

But Mr. Dalrymple came to her aid.

'Well, Phœbe, to tell you the truth, I am very much of the same mind.'

'Are you, indeed, sir?'

'Yes, and my good friend Mr. Pample has so

often urged the same matter upon me that——’ Mr. Dalrymple here paused, went to the window, and looked out ; while Mr. Pample looked at Mrs. Hammett, and then drew nearer to where Phœbe stood, evidently puzzled, and not altogether at his ease, as to what was coming. Suddenly there came a loud ring at the bell.

‘ Ay, there she is ! Well, Phœbe, I shall presently be able to introduce you to one, who, I trust, will give me the opportunity you so kindly desire for me ; who will also, I hope, set at rest all Mr. Pample’s uneasiness ; and who will, I am sure, need and benefit by Mrs. Hammett’s kindly forethought and care.’ And, then turning to that lady, he said, with the old courtly grace which separated him so widely from many of his foxhunting brethren, ‘ If I have seemed to you especially glad of your arrival and gratified with our converse, it is not so much for my own sake, glad as I am to welcome you, as for that of the young lady who has, I think, just now arrived.’

While they all waited in wonder to see who the young lady might be, Phœbe in particular felt her

heart sink as she saw the fading of her latest day-dream—that she would on this visit win the squire's favour towards Guy—that the boy should be taken into the Hall and be placed, as she hoped, permanently, near to the squire's own person. Nature, she thought, might do the rest without exposing her secret guilt. So Guy would get near his father, and be away from Susanna. Such had been Phœbe's last and failing scheme.

Again the bell rang, and more loudly.

‘Why,’ exclaimed Mr. Dalrymple, with an apparent anger and excitement quite unusual to him, as he went and pulled at his own bell, ‘how the rascals keep her waiting at the door! It's time, I think, we had a mistress here.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

LUCY.

WAS the squire, then, going to be married after all? Had he brought home a wife thus unexpectedly? These were the questions that each of the three persons he had left in the dining-room asked in his or her silent thoughts, though neither of them said a word to the others. They all waited in a kind of grim expectation the return of the squire with the young lady he was about to introduce. Mr. Pample looked at his fingers inquisitively; then he contemplated the colour of the wine in his glass; then, suddenly rising, he began to pace to and fro the room, but as suddenly remembered that if Mr. Dalrymple was not present other parties were who might notice his conduct, so he went to the window and there remained, trying apparently to get a glimpse of what was passing in

the courtyard below, but unable to accomplish his desire. Yet, if what he imagined were true, and Mr. Dalrymple had found for himself a wife, why should the steward be troubled, seeing that he had himself advised precisely such a step? Still, he was troubled; and if there had been accurate observers present they must have noticed how absorbed he was in gloomy reflection. But he knew well enough the persons present were not observers of this kind. Phœbe, to his eyes, was not worth a second thought; and as to Mrs. Hammett, she was too simple-hearted, too open and unsuspecting, to be capable of imagining anything peculiar in the abstractions of her cousin. No doubt he had (she said to herself) a deal to think of, with all the affairs of so large an estate upon his hands; and with that comment she dismissed the subject to return to the previous one that had attracted her—the position and conduct of the squire. She was interested, but not at all chagrined, at the possible ending of Mr. Pample's scheme for her; for she began to think he had seriously designed for her a brilliant marriage and position. On the whole, she was rather amused

than otherwise to think how well the intending bridegroom must have kept his own counsel to make all his arrangements in secret, while laughing, no doubt, at the well-meant efforts and appeals of his friends to get him to do precisely that which he had arranged should be done.

Phœbe, who sat apart from both, looked all the while the very picture of despair. Her scheme, she was now certain, was hopeless. Well, then, she ought to tell Mr. Dalrymple of her poverty, and see if he felt inclined to help her for the boy's sake ; so that, at least, Guy might be retained at school, and actual famine be kept off. But she was depressed, wretched, and seemed to have no particle of courage left to tell her tale. Again and again she sighed heavily. Guy, who had now completed the tour of the apartment, came to her ; and, seeing her sad look, put his hand in hers and leaned his shoulder against her. She understood the movement and clasped him round the waist, and strained him to her side so passionately that the boy felt only the more sure that something was wrong, and although he did not speak he would not again move from her

side. Not, at least, till he was called for by the squire, as strange to say he was, when an entire hour had passed away. No explanation was given.

A servant merely put in his head and said,

‘Please, Mrs. Waterman, will you let your boy go to the squire?’

Guy looked as if he did not half like to leave his mother; but she, with glad heart and trembling hands, undid and retied his neck-ribbon, smoothed his hair, kissed him fervently, and sent him away. Once more her eager soul began to speculate with hope and joy on this new incident, which seemed to show that the squire was, after all, about to ‘take to the boy.’

Let us clear up the mystery.

When Mr. Dalrymple left the dining-room he met one of the servants, who said to him as he was hurrying along,

‘The young lady, sir, ’s in the little study. She seems very bad, sir. Robert, the coachman, says whenever he looked into the carriage he saw her always crying.’

‘Poor thing! Poor thing!’ ejaculated Mr. Dal-

rymple, and passed on. When he entered the study (the same that contained the portrait of his deceased wife), he found a little girl, some eight or ten years old, sitting on a chair in a corner, looking with a strange and scared look towards him as he came in. Her face was rather pretty than beautiful, though, no doubt, she had impaired its appearance by her long fit of weeping, and by the general sense of anguish that was stamped upon her features. But she was no longer crying; she seemed to feel the critical moment had come; that she must be a woman now, and do as she had been told she ought to do. So, mastering her grief for a time, she sat resigned, pale, but unable to hide the frightened look with which she met the lord of Branhape, her rich relative and future guardian.

Lucy Dalrymple was the daughter of a distant offshoot of the squire's family, a doctor, an amiable, but not very energetic man, who had never succeeded in obtaining patients; and who, being too proud to beg for help from the Dalrymples, was starving in a kind of genteel way at a remote watering-place. Mr. Dalrymple had known nothing

of his circumstances, and, till recently, was scarcely aware that the doctor had any family. But when his friends and Mr. Pample began to remonstrate with him upon his solitary condition, he saw they would never let him rest, unless he found some solution of the difficulty of his state. As to marriage, he would have felt the proposition little less than an insult, had he not been sure, as he thought, of the goodness of the motives of those who urged it, Mr. Pample included. But he saw they were right in thinking he should do something. So, after a good deal of cogitation, he began to reckon what relatives he had, from among whose families he might adopt a child to be his heir. It was characteristic of him that he finally passed over all the well-to-do among his kindred, who were only too ready, each and all, to meet his wishes, in order to fix upon the poor doctor, whose circumstances then first became known to him. But this poor doctor was precisely the man who gave him the greatest difficulty to deal with. He did not want to part with his darling and eldest girl, though he had three other children; and she shared all his feelings

and begged him not to let her go. But the wiser mother—and who perhaps, was also the most loving—eventually persuaded both of them that it was best to consent. She urged that the squire was not only a rich man but a good man; and when that argument had convinced the doctor, but still left Lucy as obdurate as ever, the mother found a new source of strength in relating the squire's history, with the loss of his dearly-beloved wife at sea, and the previous death of his only child. When Lucy heard that she began to listen. After a while she dried her tears; and so, in another day or two, she was eventually persuaded to consent. The doctor declared she should not go without that consent being clearly given; but the mother, with loving tact, was able to use the condition as a new advantage, by appealing to the generous will of the child. And so, at last, Lucy had consented to go to Bran-hape, there to be educated as the future mistress of the Hall, and to leave her own dear though poverty-stricken home, and the parents whom she almost worshipped.

And when once the child had consented, she bore

up bravely through all the business of preparation and the making of new dresses, &c., requisite for her suitable appearance. Now and then, while her mother was trying to make her express some pleasure at the sight of a silk frock or some pretty jewel for her hair that had been bought for her by the squire's orders, a sudden tear would start unbidden, but was instantly and sternly repressed, for she knew that the poor mother was suffering more than herself, and yet she saw how well all the suffering was concealed. And thus she was leaving them, appearing at the last so unmoved that the mother's heart ached as she thought that she had taught the child a hard lesson only too well ; but she was undeceived when the very latest moment arrived, and she felt the sudden clasp about her neck, and the heaving of the tender little form that still would not speak, and tried hard not to sob. She went away, with the blessings of her parents on her head, who were greatly comforted by the sight of Lucy's growing moral strength ; and they fondly hoped that the novelty of the journey and of her destination would keep her from giving way to any serious outbreaks of grief when they were divided.

from her. It had been thought best for the parents not to go with her all the way to Branhape; so they accompanied her to a village about ten miles from the Hall; and there left her, as we have seen, under the charge of the squire's trusty servant, Robert.

It was well that the parents were left in this delusion, for the knowledge of the truth would probably have induced them to hurry back with her to their home. When the child found herself alone in the carriage, with no one to see how she behaved or felt, and with no one to stimulate her failing courage, she broke out into such passionate fits of grief that Robert declared he had never had so miserable a job in his life as the bringing her to Branhape.

But Nature is wiser than we are, and she was doing for Lucy exactly what it was best for Lucy should be done. She was calling forth the grief that would not be restrained any longer, giving relief to the overcharged spirit, and so preparing for the reaction which is sure to come to youth and health. By the time that Lucy had reached the Hall she had pretty well worn out the passionate-ness of her distress; had begun a little to clear

her face; and was able to meet the squire better than he expected.

‘So, my little one, you’ve come to see the old fellow, have you, and to try to make a little amusement out of him when you’ve got nothing else to do, eh?’ Lucy listened, looked at him, and wondered. He didn’t look unkind, and yet his speech sounded odd. As she said nothing in answer to that, the squire began to undo her bonnet, observing the while,

‘I wonder what sort of a lady’s-maid I should make? Now, you mustn’t laugh, you know.’ Just the faintest gleam of a smile began to break out over the pretty childlike face; but almost as soon as the squire thought he saw the dawning success of his efforts a great big tear began to steal forth.

The squire was fairly nonplussed. He felt sure there would be another outbreak if he could not anticipate it at its source and turn it into another direction. She allowed him to take off her bonnet and her little cloak, but still said not a word—unless, indeed, a something that sounded like an

echo of a 'No' or a 'Yes' occasionally, in answer to his questions, was indeed a legitimate English word.

'Do you like pictures?' asked the squire. It was a lucky question. The little girl nodded her head in answer. 'Is this at all like your mother, do you think!' next said the squire, taking her to the portrait of Mrs. Dalrymple. The squire knew he had done wrong the moment the first word had escaped his lips; but he knew also that courage, with children, is a captivating quality. So he fairly waited the result, and looked in her face as if with no shadow of misgiving. At first his success was perfect. The child smiled, drew nearer, looked at it, and seemed about to speak, when some latent idea of home rose up, and in such vivid and entrancing colours, before the child's imagination, that she murmured—

'I want to go back again; I don't want to stay here.' And then came down the heavy storm the squire had so long feared.

And then it was that the squire, after sundry unsuccessful attempts to get her into conversation,

bethought him of the presence of Guy, and instantly sent off the servant to fetch him.

‘Children best understand children. I’ll be bound you lad will amuse her more in ten minutes than I shall in as many days.’

When Guy came, his colour a little heightened by his wonder, but his aspect and gestures still exhibiting their ordinary serenity and independence, he looked at the squire and then at his little companion, and his wonder naturally grew greater.

‘Here, Guy, my man, if you are worthy of your name, here’s the very case for you—a damsel in distress and wanting succour. But if you don’t understand that—’

‘Oh, but I do,’ observed Guy, returning with interest the squire’s look.

‘The deuce you do! Well, let’s see! This little girl has just left her home, and she’s so kind as to come here and try to comfort me; but she’s not behaving well at the outset, for she insists on my trying to comfort her; and, worse than all, she doesn’t mind me when I do try.’ This was said with so much arch pleasantry that Lucy could not

help again looking at her future guardian; and then from him her eyes glanced towards the bright-faced boy who stood there, and who laughed as their eyes met. Then she laughed, too, though she was vexed, for she thought they were both laughing at her.

‘Well, now, Guy, walk about with her; show her the house, If you don’t know your way, never mind, so long as you don’t get towards the fishpond in the garden, which is very deep and dangerous.’

‘Fishpond! Please, which is the way to it?’ asked Guy.

And the squire could not help giving a hearty laugh at this practical illustration of the value of his warning.

‘Well, go along across the courtyard to that little gate you see there through the window; that’s the way, since you must get into danger. But mind, if you drown her I’ll certainly have you hanged.’

‘Please, what’s her name?’ asked Guy.

‘Lucy.’

‘Come along, Lucy, we’ll have famous sport. I can fish, and I’ll teach you if you like.’

‘Oh, no, I can’t fish, and I don’t like to fish.’

‘Well, but won’t you like to see me fish?’

‘N—o,’ Lucy was about to say, but Guy cut her short by the observation,

‘Oh, nonsense ; you don’t know what you’re talking about. So come along.’

Guy put out his hand, and, wonderful to say, the timid little maiden took it, after a long look in his frank face, but still not without the question—

‘You won’t let me be drowned, will you?’

Guy’s laugh was his only answer ; and the squire was greatly deceived, as he afterwards said to Phœbe, if he didn’t hear two laughs mingling pleasantly together before the threshold of the house was crossed on the way to the fishpond in the garden.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NATURAL BUT UNWELCOME ADVICE.

PLEASED with his latest idea for winning the child, the squire returned to the dining-room, where his reappearance alone gave new surprise. But remembering, when he got there, how he had left the persons present, he went to a window, looked out, then called to them—

‘Here!’

They all came, Mrs. Hammett first, Mr. Pample next, and then Phœbe.

‘There she is,’ said the squire, ‘just now crossing the courtyard with Guy. That is the young lady I meant to have introduced to you, but I have been obliged to content myself for the present with simply introducing your boy, Phœbe, to her. That young lady is a distant relative of mine. I have adopted her; henceforward be so good as to treat her in every respect as if she were my own child. Nor

will that be very difficult, I think ; for she is, if I am not deceived, a good and sweet girl, and one that will win all hearts by-and-by.'

'So,' thought Mrs. Hammett, 'my chance, if I had any, is not entirely gone ; but, thank goodness, I don't care if it is. He's a kind and good gentleman, and I like him all the better for so taking care of his family.'

'So,' thought Mr. Pample, 'matters are not as bad as I fancied, but I must wait to see in which direction my interest now lies.'

'So,' thought Phœbe, 'I've fooled myself a second time. There's now no longer a chance for Guy. That girl has pushed him out from his own father's hearth. Oh, if I might but speak. I hate her already. If I might but speak !'

'Well, Phœbe,' said the squire to her presently, 'you must leave Guy for a few hours—or—till to-morrow. Yes, I'll send him home to-morrow. The young thing will have got reconciled by that time to the place and to us all. But, bless me, what ails you? I asked you before, but I don't think you answered. What's amiss?'

Phœbe had here as good an opportunity as she could have desired, but somehow the old pride was strong, and she had given to it a new kind of sanctity by persuading herself that she ought to be proud for Guy's sake ; so, instead of narrating frankly her husband's misfortunes and their present poverty, she would only say, after a search in her pocket, and bringing forth the watch in a yellow satin bag she had made for it,

‘ Please, sir, would you mind receiving this back to keep for a time, till—.’ The squire was startled, and for a moment looked angry ; but presently he understood the case better, and said—

‘ Phœbe, if there is one thing more than another that I like to see in people when they come to me on business of any kind, it is straightforwardness. Now, you are not straightforward with me. You can't suppose I am going to play the pawnbroker with my own gift ; and if you need my help, why don't you plainly say so, and let me judge for myself whether I can or cannot do what you wish ? ’

Phœbe had never before been thus spoken to by him ; and whilst she felt the justice she winced

under the severity of the words. But they only confirmed her bad habit of reticence. She determined at once she would do nothing, ask for nothing, except for Guy; and she felt that she was thus resenting, in the only way open to her, what had been said. With a flushing cheek, and a hurried and tremulous voice, she went on—

‘The boy, sir; Guy.’

‘Yes; what of him?’

‘I’m afraid I can’t keep him at school any longer; we are too poor, and that’s what troubles me. It’s that I was thinking of when I thought we had better part with the watch; and then, sir, I hadn’t the heart to let it go, for what would he have thought when he grew up to know of such a gift, and to have lost it by no fault of his?’

‘True, true; and it was kind and careful of you, Phœbe, to think and feel so. But, another time, have more confidence in me. I don’t pretend to say beforehand I can do anything you may choose to ask of me; but I do say I am more likely to do it by being told the whole truth at once.’

‘I am very sorry, sir, I am sure—’

‘That’s enough. Not a word more, Phœbe. Well, now, go home, and make your mind easy about the boy. Send him to school as usual, and let the quarterly bill come to me. That will be better than my sending the money to you. The master will be only the more anxious to do his best for your lad. I like Guy ; he’s frank and fearless. But, mind, don’t spoil him ; don’t educate him too well for his station. He can’t live the life of a gentleman, you know ; he must work, and must have a good trade. Don’t forget that. When he’s ready to be apprenticed, if you need my help come to me again. But, I repeat, don’t teach him to be dissatisfied with the career before him by over-training. Another glass of wine ? No ! Well, good-by. Guy shall come back to-morrow, and now let your mind be at ease.’

Phœbe curtsied and went away, but in a very different frame of mind from what the squire supposed. His kindness was rankling like poison in her soul, for had he not said, ‘Don’t educate him too well for his station ; he can’t live the life of a gentleman ?’ And Phœbe, whose soul was absorbed

in the ever-growing desire to make Guy aspire, and to see him the 'gentleman,' seemed to see an enemy in the squire because he could not penetrate instinctively into the truth of the boy's birth, and remove the evils produced by her own guilt without telling her it was guilt, or letting her endure any of its natural consequences.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FISHPOND.

LUCY still held Guy's hand—and evidently did not want to let it go—as he conducted her in the direction pointed out by the squire as leading to the fish-pond. They crossed the court-yard, where the little girl shrunk back suddenly in alarm as a proud curveting horse was brought forth for exercise.

‘Perhaps that’s for you,’ said Guy.

‘Me!’ exclaimed the timid little maiden, her eyes opening more and more widely as she looked to Guy to see if he were serious, and then at the coal-black, beautiful animal, who arched his neck and struck his feet out at the ground till he made the sparks fly from the pavement.

‘Well, I don’t suppose they’ll put you on it yet—not till you’ve learned to ride,’ said Guy, looking at her so coolly and yet with so much good-humoured

maliciousness in his laughing eye, that Lucy began to toss her head and cry out,

‘Oh, you are a story-teller! Now I shan’t believe a word you say.’

‘Just as you like—only let’s get along. I wish they’d let me ride him,’ added Guy, looking wistfully after the beautiful creature as he was led away by a groom.

‘Why, do you know how to ride him?’

‘No, but it don’t matter; I’d soon find out; and if he threw me two or three times I could get up again.’ Lucy looked at him and began to admire his boyish courage, which seemed to her almost superhuman.

Guy did not in the least notice her respectful wonder, nor did he appear to think he had said anything worthy of the slightest comment. And so chatting they got to the fish-pond.

It was a place that would have delighted an artist, a poet, or a lover of the more picturesque remains of antiquity. You saw at the first glance that the pond was of very ancient construction. The massive circular brickwork (measuring several yards

across) only just appearing above the soil of the garden on its outside, but going down to a great depth within; the thick covering of green vegetation, chiefly mosses and small aquatic grasses (with here and there a flower), that overspread the inner surface of the brickwork, as seen through the transparent water, and streamed out from every rift in the structure; the water-lilies on the surface that seemed to have been undisturbed from time immemorial; and, above all, the red, thick, succulent, arching stems of the blackberries that shot out from the ruin that overhung the pond on one side, and swayed gracefully up and down, high over the lilies, with every motion of the breeze, all helped to make up a picture that at once fascinated these young hearts. Lucy with a cry of joy, and Guy with a more sedate expression of his pleasure, threw themselves down on the sward just at the rim, and forgetting all about the fish, began to try to reach the magnificent lilyflowers that were then blooming abundantly.

‘Take care, Lucy! that isn’t the way to get them. You’ll be falling in, and the fishes will be

eating you up, and I shall get hanged for it by the squire. You kneel there; no—farther back; and then give me your hand while I stretch forward. I can reach a long way then, and you won't be in any danger.'

'But you will.'

'Silly! Of course I shan't if you hold me fast and keep far enough back.'

But just as these arrangements were carried successfully into effect, and the first flower had been safely brought to land, and Guy was going to get a lot more, a servant, whom they had not noticed, advanced and said angrily to Guy,

'You musn't do that! The pond's very deep. The squire told me to see the young lady came to no harm.'

Guy looked at the man, and the man looked at him; but if the latter expected any acknowledgment of error as to the past, or promise of amendment for the future, he was mistaken. Guy turned to Lucy and said,

'Let's go to the tower;' and turning on his heel took no more notice of the amazed attendant, who

couldn't at all understand the 'impedence,' as he subsequently called it when commenting on the matter in the servants' hall, 'of that boy of the Watermans, who didn't seem to have a bit of gentility in him—no more manners than a pig—and spoke to his betters jest as though he were one of 'em.'

The tower to which Guy now led the way was a part of an old monastic structure that had stood on the site many centuries ago. Its lower portion was almost concealed by the earth that had in the course of time been piled up against it to a height of many feet, and made the upper part seem as though it grew directly out of a great mound. All that upper portion was so luxuriantly covered with ivy, that one could only get a glimpse here and there of the small but ornamental windows that had originally admitted light to the building. It was a complete ruin, and could only be ascended in safety by artificial aid, as the winding steps in the interior were much broken. But Guy, after just one word to Lucy, 'Stay here at the bottom till I try if we can both get up,' was soon flying from point to

point upwards, the very stones on which he rested his feet toppling down an instant after he left them with a great crash to the bottom, and alarming Lucy so much that she called out,

‘ Oh, do come down ! I’m sure you’ll hurt yourself !’ But Guy, never troubling himself to reflect how he was to get back, went on and up till he reached the summit ; where, looking over the battlement, he began to call to Lucy to come out and see. She heard and came ; and, as he waved his cap, she waved her handkerchief in answer, but also said,

‘ Oh, Guy, how will you get down again ?’

‘ What do you say ?’ inquired Guy, unable to distinguish her words and soft tones at the height he had reached.

‘ The stones keep falling inside. I’m sure you can’t get down safely. Don’t try. Don’t !’

‘ Stop a bit ; let me see for myself !’ shouted Guy, and away he went.

Apparently he made a trial, and found the affair difficult and dangerous. So he came back to the battlement and called out laughingly,

‘I’m taken prisoner ! You must get a basket and a rope, and send me up plenty of things to eat. Won’t that be good fun ?’

‘Oh, Guy, what will you do?’ cried the distressed little maiden. ‘Stop ! I’ll call the man to help you.’

‘If you do I’ll jump down.’

‘No—no—no !’

‘Very well, then. Be quiet, and I’ll find another way.’

So saying, Guy, to the increasing fright of Lucy, got over the battlement, and began to feel all about the stems of the ivy, which reached to the top of the tower. But apparently he did not care to trust himself to their tender mercies, tightly as they seemed to cling to the wall ; for, after a few unsatisfactory experiments, he stopped, got back again over the battlement, and seemed fairly defeated.

‘Guy, Guy, perhaps they can get you a very tall ladder ! Do stop. I am so frightened.’ Guy’s only answer was,

‘Look out down there ! I am coming.’ He then threw a cord with a stone fastened at the end

towards the branch of a great walnut-tree that grew near the tower. At first Lucy could not understand what he wanted to do. But, after throwing his cord two or three times, she saw it had got entangled in the tree. Then she saw the cord gradually tightening, and the branch following it, nearer and nearer, towards the tower. But it was a strong branch, and it was not easy to get it near enough for Guy's purposes. He had to wind his cord round one of the stone pieces of the battlement to enable him to maintain his hold, and to rest for a moment between each fresh pull. But at last, when Guy's utmost strength failed to draw it any nearer, he fastened his cord safely ; and then measured the distance from the battlement to the nearest part of the branch that could be at all trusted to bear his weight. It was probably not more than three feet that he would have to leap to clasp the overhanging bough, and had he been close to the ground it would not have needed a boy of Guy's courage to perform the feat safely. But here, at this height, it was a very different thing. If he missed the bough, or if it broke with him, it

was almost certain death. Guy looked at the bough steadily. He said to himself,

‘I know I can do it, and I will!’

He leaped, caught the bough safely, but then a thing happened which he had not calculated on. He had intended, after once getting safe hold, to have climbed along the branch, hanging below it, till he reached the trunk, when he knew the rest would be easy. But the cord with which he had fastened the bough so far out of its natural place was snapped by the sudden force of his leap, and off went the bough, like a gigantic spring just let loose, with the boy clinging to it, who heard, as he swung through the air, Lucy’s piercing shrieks. But, although startled by the unexpectedness of the incident, and stunned by the violence with which his head struck against some projecting snag, he clung with such tenacity to his hold that he was not really in danger for a single moment. And when he had recovered from the shock he began to descend. He did this a little more leisurely than he had intended, but still with sufficient ease and vivacity to set all Lucy’s fears at rest. Presently he stood on the

sward, looking a little pale, but his eye as full of glad light as ever, and his voice not a jot less cheery than its wont, as he said laughingly,

‘ I just did get an ugly knock on the head when I was swung across so fast ! ’

He had scarcely spoken before Mr. Dalrymple appeared on the scene. He had been warned by the servant (whom he had set to watch) that Guy Waterman, after getting the young lady into no end of ‘ scrapes,’ had finished off by climbing to the top of the tower, and ‘ would most like break his neck ’ in getting down. The squire had hurried to the place, and had been an unsuspected and delighted observer of all Guy’s later proceedings. Mr. Dalrymple, as an old sportsman, rather liked than feared danger, and he had a great love of the adventurous. So, seeing Lucy was safe, he allowed Guy to take his own course, satisfying himself as regards his duty to Phœbe by the remark,

‘ If it were my own son he should go through with it, now that he has got into the mess. My own son ! Heaven help me, I wish he was ! Yes, he might have been just such a boy—as handsome, fearless,

and full of spirit ; and he would have been just the same age.'

As soon as Guy alighted, the squire went up to him with a grave face.

'How dare you risk your life in this way, sir? Eh? Come, get in with you, and don't talk to me. D'ye expect you're going to be another Marlborough or a Sir Francis Drake?'

'I wish I might be,' said Guy, flushing.

'Pooh! pooh! Your business is to make boots or shoes, grow cabbages, or breed pigs. By the Lord! though, you dog! you did that well. Didn't he, Lucy?'

'Y—yes,' timidly answered the girl, as she put her hand in Mr. Dalrymple's and felt it clasped warmly ; for the squire saw his recipe had been successful. Yes, Lucy felt already at home, and the kind-hearted squire began to think that the introduction of this little maiden to his house would make Branhape henceforth a happier place.

And, feeling already a kindly sentiment towards Guy, not only for his wife's sake, but on account of the lad's own character, he could not but show him

how much he appreciated the service he had done him.

‘Yes,’ thought he, ‘like loves like ; children can best win children at times like these. Well, Guy,’ he continued, as they walked back towards the house, ‘you have accomplished what I told you I wanted to be done, if you didn’t exactly proceed as I should have advised. What can I do for you in return? Have you thought better of it, and will you take that guinea I offered you? Guineas, my lad, are uncommonly useful things, as you’ll find out by-and-by. Come, now speak out like a man. I want to do you a pleasure in return for your success with my little friend here. What shall it be?’

Guy looked at the speaker, then at Lucy, and at last said, a little shily,

‘Please may I come back again some day?’

‘To be sure you shall. I’ll send for you at holiday times, when you’re home from school.’

Guy’s bright face grew still brighter at this, but he said no more. An hour or two later the three were all in the little study together, Lucy sitting on the squire’s knee, a very picture of timid happiness,

while Guy turned over a great book of pictures almost as big as himself that was on the table, and plied his questions so thick and fast as to the meaning of everything represented in the plates that the squire found his learning quite insufficient to satisfy the busy little querist ; and he was obliged to confess to himself, with a kind of laughing shame, that he was much more frequently evading than answering the knotty problems presented for solution.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Hammett, who looked only the more handsome as she grew more cosy and domesticated, made tea. As the squire sipped it and handed his cup somewhat frequently he caught himself more than once wistfully perusing Guy's face, and wondering as to the lad's future.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PHŒBE HAS BAD DREAMS.

THE soreness created by the squire's reproof of her ambition gave to Phœbe, as she wandered home after her interview with him, a fresh sense of the bitterness of her own and her husband's poverty. Somehow, she fancied her very care of Guy entitled her to different treatment. Well, she must go back, and tell Stephen he must again go off tramping about the neighbourhood to seek work of any kind, no matter how humble, while she borrows a few shillings more from Susanna ; who, though she has always lent Phœbe whatever she asked for, did it in so business-like a manner, and was so punctual in looking for repayment at the time promised, that Phœbe hated to have recourse to her, and would, but for Stephen's sake, have often preferred going hungry to bed. Well, now she must again, and for

a larger sum, seek that young lady's aid ; who, with admirable caution, had not only taken the advice of the carrier to keep all her money locked up until she was of age, but has even drawn less than she was permitted to do for her board, lodging, and education, as though she had a secret misgiving that any spare cash would be in danger, while the Watermans were in distress.

But Susanna was in such excellent spirits when Phœbe got home, and was so kind and attentive, and had prepared such a nice cup of tea for her (some of her mother's hoarded gunpowder, worth 10s. a pound), that Phœbe's heart began to soften, and before she had quite made up her mind how or when to speak she was anticipated :

‘ Oh, Mrs. Waterman, I've got a guinea more than I shall want till next quarter-day, and wish you'd take care of it for me, and use it if you want, and then pay me again when it's quite convenient.’

Phœbe looked at her fair face, drew her towards her, kissed her, wiped away a tear from her own eye, and began to enjoy her cup of tea with something like peace of mind.

It was, however, as we shall see, but for a short space.

Whether it was the green tea, of which Susanna, in her amiable mood, had given her an uncommonly strong dose, or the agitation of Phœbe's thoughts all through the day, or the sense of disappointment as to Guy's future career, or the grim vision of hard poverty for years to come—whether it was one, or more, or all of these things together that produced the result, certainly Phœbe, though fatigued, was long in getting to sleep that night; and when she did succeed she kept starting and crying out, and waking Stephen; who, however, always went off again placidly enough, and at last ceased even to be disturbed. Poor man! he had walked some twenty miles since dinner, in the hope of getting a little contract that would, as he said, have set him on his legs again. 'But it had gone—worse luck!—when he got there.'

In the morning just at daybreak, Phœbe, after a long period of unconsciousness, awoke. At first, she seemed overpowered by a vague sense of physical misery. Her every limb and joint ached,

her head seemed unable to support itself, her eyes were hot, her lips burning, her whole frame dry and feverish. But the impressions of her physical state passed off in the rapid oncoming of a host of agitating recollections of her dreams. She tried to recall them. It seemed to her that she had been tossing at sea under an intensely black sky, when a single star, that somehow seemed to belong to Mrs. Dalrymple's face, looked down on her. Up and down ceaselessly she went upon the tremendous waves, and seemed to be always striving to reach some object—what it was she could not recall. But then, again, she seemed to see even from the deck of the ship right into the workshop, and her eyeballs strained as they beheld some form there moving about, and touching the brick, and taking it from the place ; and then a hand went in, and came forth with the packet ; and then Phœbe had striven to move, to cry out, but had simply moaned helplessly, while the thief went off with the prize. These were the only ideas at all clear that Phœbe could extract from the recollection of her night of miserable dreams ; and they were sufficient to make

her sit up, staring in her bed, and looking round her to be quite sure that they were dreams only. The first grey light of morning was just visible. Stephen slept peaceably by her side; all was still in the house. Yes, Phœbe had been dreaming plainly enough; and though she now felt her whole body wet with a chilling perspiration (so great had been her mental distress), yet it was only a dream, she said to herself, and she must quiet herself, and go to sleep again to get strength for the day.

But presently the remembrance of Susanna's attempt on the workshop, one that had so nearly ended fatally, came back forcibly to her mind, and with it she recalled the amiable and generous mood of last night. The two recollections made her so restless that she got up and went to the window to look out towards the workshop. She saw nothing, and again tried to persuade herself that it was nonsense for her to think that dreams ever truly warned people of impending danger. Phœbe was convinced that her fears were absurd, but she feared not the less. At last she thought she would dress herself, go out as far as the workshop to be quite satisfied,

and, after a few minutes' walk in the cool air, come back again, and then try to sleep, thus refreshed.

She hastily threw on her clothes, went out at the door, listened to hear if Susanna was awake, cautiously stole up the stairs and unclosed the door, and drew near till she could hear the low measured breathing of the sleeper. Reassured, and half-inclined to laugh at her own bad dreams, and the folly they now led her into, she still thought, as she was dressed, she would fulfil her purpose, and so be more comfortable afterwards. She went downstairs into the darkness of the shuttered room, found her way to the garden door, undid all its fastenings with a careful hand, and she noticed, as she did so, that they were exactly as she had left them the night before—a fact that again convinced her Susanna had not been out to the workshop; for she would have been too idle or careless, girl as she was, Phœbe thought, to have refastened each of the four or five troublesome and complicated parts of the household system of door defence.

The air felt fresh as she stepped forth, and it seemed to revive her, and to bring home still more

forcibly to her aroused common sense the absurdity of what she was doing, seeing that her very restlessness about the workshop and her haunting it at such unseemly hours was the very way to beget suspicion of the cause, and so to endanger her secret. But the wisest reasoners in the world would have talked uselessly to Phœbe just then. She hadn't the least belief that anything was wrong, but her bad dreams could not be got rid of till she had again seen that the place of deposit of Mrs. Dalrymple's package remained undisturbed.

She reached the workshop, went in, glanced rapidly towards the brick, but could distinguish nothing clearly in the morning dusk, except that the brick was in its place. Reaching up as high as she could she was able feel the surface, and that, too, seemed all right; but at that moment her foot crushed something beneath her weight that sent a kind of electric thrill through Phœbe's frame. It was a lump of plaster, just such a thing as might have fallen out if the brick had been recently disturbed, and such as Phœbe felt in an instant could hardly have been there in any other way. She

could not rest after this until she had obtained a light and looked at the minute marks that we have already spoken of as having been so noted and studied by her, that it was certain the brick could not be taken out and replaced but Phœbe would be able to recognize some change, however slight it might be. She glided back into the house to get the tinder-box; for she had taken care to have Stephen's removed after Susanna's late visit, and again came back. One moment and Phœbe saw with unerring eye that the brick *had* been removed. Miserable woman! The pangs she felt at that instant might have gone far to make up a fitting punishment for her crime.

But she calmed herself with a great effort, saying, 'No, no! I won't frighten myself till I'm quite sure.' And then, getting the block of wood that she had originally used in her prolonged examination of the wall-surface, she got up to the level of the place. She touched the brick, and found that it came forth almost without an effort, though the wedge was still there, only, as she supposed, not driven in as far as she had left it.

Before putting in her fingers she could not but pause for a single instant to press her hands upon her heart—it was beating so alarmingly—then she felt, and then her bad dreams proved but too true: there was nothing within; the packet had been taken away!

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Phœbe dropped in a sitting posture on the ground, too much overpowered by this new calamity to be able suddenly to appreciate its whole force, or to judge what she could do, if she could do anything, to avert the consequences. Her hands dropped on the ground, her head bowed lower and lower after them, and in that posture of despair and humiliation Phœbe remained for a few minutes, waiting till the chaos of trouble that oppressed her should grow a little clearer, and feeling meantime as though she were reckless even if full exposure and punishment came.

This however was but a momentary state of feeling. Who had taken the packet? Who had dared thus to tamper with the trouble of Phœbe's life? Where was Susanna? Was she still in bed, simulating

sleep? Where could she have placed the packet? Had she opened it? Ha! Phœbe saw light. Perhaps Susanna (for Phœbe began to feel sure she was the thief) had only recently been here; perhaps even not many minutes before Phœbe herself, and so might not have had time or courage to open the packet; or perhaps in her cunning she might have thought it dangerous even to know any more at first than that the secret was in her power.

This was but a poor reed to lean on, but it was all that Phœbe could discover. Well, how should she proceed? Should she go at once to Susanna and try alike threats or cajolements to get the truth from her, just as circumstances dictated? Or should she watch her so closely from that very moment that she would be sure to surprise her before long looking at the packet, or doing something that would indicate the new place of its concealment, if, indeed, Susanna were the guilty party? Guy was away. Phœbe felt devoutly thankful for that. No suspicion of him, therefore, could exist. Her husband was equally clear to her mind of any participation. There remained, therefore, so it

seemed, only Susanna who could have exposed Phœbe to these new anxieties and dangers.

‘If they found me out,’ Phœbe said once to herself, with a sickly smile, ‘could they hang me, I wonder?’ On the whole, she thought, probably not. But she knew that men and women were hung for stealing a sheep; and she had heard somebody say that there was many an old law that might suddenly be brought up to hang people for crimes they didn’t know even to be punishable. Phœbe laughed hysterically to herself as she saw rising in her mind the picture of her own execution for child-stealing; but she had got used to unreal horrors, and so the vision faded harmlessly away as she went slowly back to the cottage, pondering upon the question—How should she deal with Susanna? A sudden and decisive step seemed her only chance.

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Phœbe’s first proceeding was to go direct to Susanna’s bed, put her hand on that young lady’s shoulders, and say to her—seemingly asleep though she was—in a harsh, peremptory voice,

‘ You have taken something of mine ; give it to me.’

Susanna opened her eyes, sat up in bed, looking greatly alarmed, and stared helplessly about her, not having heard or understood apparently the words that had been said. But Phœbe meant to make the very most of her desperate measure, so she repeated to the bewildered-looking girl in still harsher tones the words,

‘ You have taken something of mine ! Give it back to me instantly.’

‘ Something of yours, Mrs. Waterman !’ exclaimed Susanna, in a voice so full of surprise that Phœbe, in spite of herself, began to doubt whether indeed Susanna could be the culprit. But it so happened that that young lady on reflection remembered more than one thing belonging to Phœbe that she had coveted and taken unlawful possession of, though not exactly with the intention of stealing. So presently she said,

‘ If you mean that pretty glass bottle of yours, it is in the drawer there. I only borrowed it to put some oil in, and because I thought I would like to put it on my dressing-table.’

‘Was this artfulness or simple truth?’ Phoebe asked herself, as she turned away baffled, and thought, ‘If it is not her, I am only making matters worse.’ So, after a painful pause, she went on,

‘Oh, well, I don’t want it now; only you should ask me,’ said Phœbe. Presently she returned to the charge by saying, as she looked searchingly in the girl’s face, ‘Didn’t I hear you stirring about the house a while ago?’

‘Me, Mrs. Waterman!’ ejaculated Susanna. ‘I’ve been asleep ever since I got into bed until you waked me.’

‘Well, I’m sorry I disturbed you. Try to get off again. I’ve had such bad dreams all night, and was obliged to get up, and—and then I missed the little bottle which Stephen gave me before we were married. Good-night, dear—or, I should say, good-morning.’ And so they parted.

Phœbe went downstairs, not to her own bedroom, but into the dark sitting-room beneath, and felt for a chair, and there sat down—her soul, alas! far darker than the place in which she sat. What was she to do? Either Susanna knew nothing at all about the packet

or she was, indeed, a monster of subtlety and deception. Which was it? Phœbe could not tell. She knew only she was baffled; and that her whole future, and possibly Guy's, might now be depending upon her courage, skill, and presence of mind. Yet what could she do? She could not say to Susanna, 'I hid a packet in the workshop; you or some one has taken it away this very night.' And if it were not Susanna, who else could it be?

She sat there in the darkness, wearily going over and over the same ceaseless round of self-questioning, and getting no glimpse of a satisfactory reply. One thing, however, she determined to do—to examine all Susanna's stores, and, if she could not do so at once in secrecy, then to acknowledge she suspected her of taking something more than the little bottle, and so insist upon a complete search. Phœbe thought it even possible that, thus pressed, Susanna might prefer to give up the packet—opened or unopened, as it might be—rather than allow of such an examination.

She went upstairs to get some old keys that she remembered to have in a trunk where she guarded a

few valuables, and which she kept always locked. As she passed up the stairs, she thought she heard a rustle of clothes, and then the soft shutting of a door which must be Susanna's. What did that mean? Was the girl watching her? Again Phœbe's strong convictions returned, and she felt roused to fury at the thought that the girl should have dared so to play with her. But she took no notice for the moment, and went softly to her trunk so as not to wake Stephen, who was still asleep, and she unlocked and lifted the lid and put in her hand, when, wonder upon wonder, she felt something that sent a thrill through her very blood. It was the packet!—she knew it as she clasped it, for she had felt it too often not to know it as accurately by the feel as a blind man knows the tools he works with or the clothes he wears.

The packet there! In Phœbe's own chamber! In her own trunk! What miracle was this? Phœbe drew it out, went towards the light of the window, and saw with inexpressible relief that the seal was certainly unbroken. The wax was cracked all over, but there was still the delicate little impress

that Mrs. Dalrymple had given to it by her fingering. Well, that at least was something. Phœbe sighed, but grew better from that moment—felt more able to battle with the trouble now that she knew that whatever might be suspected nothing still could be known. She began to reflect:—

Susanna then, after all, had discovered the hiding-place, had taken away the package, but had been disturbed by Phœbe herself before she had had time to take the benefit of her cunning and pertinacity; and to escape further question, had conceived in the moment of danger the bold and skilful, but impudent idea of putting the packet into Phœbe's own possession. Of course, then, she would stick to her previous story, and know nothing whatever of the packet. It must have been Susanna whom she had heard on the stairs gliding back to her room, just in time to escape discovery.

Further reflection convinced Phœbe that Susanna's action was as consummately designed as it must have been promptly and boldly carried out. There were, in any case, two persons concerned in the deception going on—Phœbe herself who had hidden the pack-

age, and the unknown discoverer who had thus seen, handled, and given it back. ‘Yes,’ thought Phœbe, ‘she thinks I am sure to be silent for my own sake, even if I know it is she who now shares my secret.’

Phœbe put the packet into her pocket, and went down to open the shutters and get ready the breakfast. To return to bed in the hope of sleep was out of the question. She wanted to see Susanna in the light of day, to look at her face, listen to her voice, and try if she could not in some unguarded moment yet get an acknowledgment from her of what she had done; and so, at least, guard Phœbe from any misdirection of her thoughts and fears.

When breakfast was ready she called Stephen and Susanna, and went out to walk a bit in the little strip of garden ground in front of the house. A neighbour was in the adjoining garden hanging out clothes from the wash. The two women exchanged greetings. After a word or two on indifferent topics, the woman said,

‘I bin up almost all night with the toothache, and as I couldn’t sleep, I thought I might as well work,

and so I bin hard at it since two o'clock. And you, Mrs. Waterman, I see'd, was about. I began to think something was amiss when I see'd you go twice into the field towards the workshop.'

Phœbe! Twice into the field! What did the woman mean? She had been once only; it must have been Susanna that had been seen the first time. Perhaps now she could get to know with certainty the fact she only suspected.

'No, not me, neighbour,' said Phœbe. 'I went out once, for I felt ill, and thought the fresh air would revive me, and went to the workshop merely because I thought I might as well go that way as any other.'

'Well, Mrs. Waterman, but if it wasn't you, then it was your ghost.'

'And how was I dressed?' asked Phœbe, with a hollow kind of laugh.

'Just as you are now. I couldn't tell colours, but I could swear to the figure. But you know well enough, Mrs. Waterman, that it was you; and, as you've a good right to go as often as you please to your husband's shop, I don't see why you should deny it, and treat me as if I lied.'

Phœbe grew more and more confounded, but, while trying to say something to soothe her neighbour's wounded feelings, she remarked,

‘If it was me I must ha’ got up in my sleep, opened the door in my sleep, and walked out in my sleep, and got back in my sleep, and shut up the house safely again in my sleep, and got back to my bed in my sleep.’

‘Surely the best place for you, Mrs. Waterman, under the circumstances,’ observed the woman, who began to notice the earnestness of Phœbe’s manner, and to feel for the trouble that this incident seemed to cause her ; so she tried to comfort Phœbe by saying,

‘Most like, then, you were asleep. A brother of mine used often to get up in the night and go on with his work just where he had left it off in the day ; and, if you’ll believe me, one sort of work was as good as the other. So he has often told me himself. Well, I’m going in to breakfast. And I’m sure I ha’ earned it this once.’

Phœbe saw her go, and slowly began to receive the new and strange hope this conversation had called up. Yet what did the hope mean ?

Why, nothing less than this, that she had herself gone to the workshop, taken out the brick (*how* she shuddered to think of, it seemed all so inconceivable and alarming to her), removed the packet, replaced the brick so carefully that not even Phœbe could distinguish any change till she examined the mark minutely by the aid of the candle, and so gone back home.

Up and down the garden she paced vainly striving to realize all this. Of course, she could understand a good deal of what had been so difficult if it were true. Her agitation the previous day had brought up into renewed life the vivid recollection of Phœbe's most exciting periods, and especially those connected with the storm, and with her anxiety for a safe hiding-place for the packet. She remembered that she had often at night, as she lay in bed, thought to herself, would it not be better to remove the packet and put it into her own trunk, which she had always been accustomed to keep sacred from every eye?

If now she could but be sure—quite sure—that it was herself who had done all this! Terrible as

the new vista opened by the incident, still the danger in that direction was distant, and would be cheaply purchased by a restoration of her old belief that no one but herself knew of the existence of the packet. How could she get any more light upon the subject? Was there any mode of making herself certain that she had really been twice to the workshop that night?

She tried to imagine all sorts of possible occurrences as accompanying her visit, and some one of which might have left some material proof of itself. Would her dress—her shoes—bear any tokens that might reveal what she wanted to know? No—because she was unable to distinguish between what might have happened on the supposed first visit from that which might have happened on the second and certain visit.

She went in to breakfast. Susanna was already at the table, looking as fresh and lovely in her own peculiar kind of loveliness as if she had never had a trouble in the world. She smiled on Phœbe, and handed her a cup of fragrant coffee, and appeared altogether so perfectly self-possessed, that Phœbe

could not but think, 'I was unjust to her. She knows nothing after all—she's done nothing.'

But Phœbe continued to revolve in her mind the question, 'How can I be sure? I *must* be sure. I dare not put the packet back unless I am quite certain. And yet I might as well put it into her own box as into mine, now she is in the house: she is so prying and inquisitive. I know she wants to get a sight of the inside of my box, for quite other reasons than wanting to look for secret packets.'

While Phœbe mechanically took her breakfast, scarcely saying a word either to Susanna or Stephen, her eyes happened to fall upon a pair of slippers by the fireside. In an instant she remembered that she had not left them there last night. What did that mean? They were just where she was accustomed to put them if they happened to get wet. Was it possible that she had gone the first time in these slippers, had come back with them damp, and had taken them off, in her unconscious state, to put by the fireplace to get dry, just as though the fire were then burning? The ground was moist, and favoured the supposition.

It was certain she had not worn them on her waking visit, for she remembered quite well that, not finding her slippers by her bedside when she got up, she had put on the boots she still wore, which were in a neighbouring corner. In that she could not be mistaken ; she had not changed the boots since she got up, that fact was clear. If now there were marks on the ground in the way to the workshop corresponding to the slipper, the sole of which was very different to that of her boots, then, indeed, she might be sure ; for not only were the slippers too large for Susanna, who had a curiously small foot, and who would be certain not to choose such inconvenient appendages to her stealthy steps when going on a secret expedition, but there was besides the evidence of the neighbour, which, if corroborated, might be taken as decisive.

Watching for an opportunity to steal away before anyone else could go to the workshop, she took up her slippers, and then, as if without thought, holding them in her hand, made some excuse about wanting a new blind-stick from the workshop, and hurried off to look for any footmarks that might

testify as to the person who had so mysteriously haunted the place during the night. It occurred to Phœbe, as she went along, peering cautiously into every bit of depression she saw on the soil, that possibly she might find a mark that neither her own boot nor the slipper would account for, and that thus she might again be brought back to the idea of Susanna's presence and intervention.

For a time she could find scarcely a single clearly distinguishable footprint, and those which at last she did discover she knew to be from her own boot. But close to the workshop, and a little aside from the door, as though the midnight visitor had been alarmed and stepped a little out of the course to listen, she saw a print that no boot of hers had ever impressed. She stooped; she examined it with the aid of her slipper for a comparison—she saw they fitted perfectly. It was, then, Phœbe herself who had inflicted all this misery upon herself; and during which she had so nearly exposed her true position to the very girl from whom, above all other persons (the squire and Guy alone excepted), she wished to keep it concealed!

With a hurried glance towards the cottage to see that no one was following, Phœbe stepped into the workshop and replaced the packet. She thus showed how thoroughly satisfied she was that Susanna had had no part in the business; that she still knew nothing; that all this had been but a false alarm; that her bad dreams had created the danger of which they warned her.

On returning to the cottage she said to Stephen and Susanna :

‘ An odd thing has happened to-night. I bin to the workshop just now to see if I can make it out. Our neighbour tells me she saw me go twice into the field towards the workshop. And I knew I’d bin once, for I had a dreadful night, full of bad dreams, and not being able to sleep I went out into the garden at daybreak, and then into the fields, just to while away time, for I didn’t want to wake you. Of course I wouldn’t believe her, and I laughed, till I saw she was getting angry. But she was right enough, I’m sorry to say.’

‘ Why, you don’t mean it, Mrs. Waterman, that

you've been walking in your sleep! How horrid! I think I should have died if I'd met you.'

'Well, it isn't pleasant, either for oneself or for other people,' observed Phœbe, with a wan smile.

'But how do you know it's true?' asked Stephen.

'Because my slippers there tell the tale. They've left their mark near the workshop door, and I'm quite sure I didn't put them on when I got up in my waking state, for I couldn't find them, and so got my boots, and they've never been off since. Take the slippers and go and look, Susy. You'll find it as I say.'

Susanna ran off, so full of the bit of excitement, that Phœbe again felt sure that the girl was innocent of any of the night's doings. But as soon as she had disappeared, Phœbe put her hand on her husband's arm, and said to him with a sadness of tone that touched him deeply,

'Stephen, I'm very miserable, but don't let me get worse. Don't let me go wandering about the country in this fashion. You won't, will you? Tell me you won't. You'll watch me—wake me—lock me in, if necessary. Speak! say you will.'

Stephen looked at his poor haggard-faced wife as he replied,

‘To be sure I will; don’t you be afeard of that. I’ll fasten the windows, so that you can’t undo them, for I’ve heerd as how your cunning sleepwalkers get very clever that way, and I’ll lock the door the last thing, and hide the key. Come, come, lass, cheer up! We won’t allus have such hard times. Perhaps the doctor can tell us o’ summut that’ll prevent you from getting into that way agin. It doesn’t follow that because you done it once you’re to go on adoin’ it.’ †

Phœbe’s lips moved inarticulately, as if in reply; a moment later, she dropped on the floor

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FUTURE LADY OF BRANHAPE.

THE commotion produced by Phœbe's fall brought Susanna downstairs to help; and she and Stephen set to work with restoratives; but they were spared further trouble by Phœbe's recovery. With another of those long-drawn sighs, which seemed to have become not so much an evidence of mental distress as an effort of the body for physical relief from some kind of unendurable oppression, she opened her eyes, looked with a frightened look in the faces of Stephen and Susanna, then, gradually remembering all that had passed, she strove to get up, and, with the aid of Stephen's encircling arm, managed to reseat herself in the chair from which she had fallen.

‘Where's Guy?’ she asked, in a feeble voice.
‘Hasn't he come back yet? I wish he was here.’

‘Shall I fetch him?’ asked Stephen, whose better

nature had been greatly moved by his wife's illness as well as by her previous sorrow.

'No, no,' replied Phœbe; 'I shall be better soon, I dare say.'

Her eyes turned towards Susanna, who knelt close by, looking up with the tenderest interest and sympathy, and apparently quite unconscious that Phœbe had ever suspected, ever beaten her. But Phœbe, though she responded by a faint smile, and by a pressure of the hand to the kindness and attention of both, could not help letting her head keep turning towards the door, as though longing to see it opened; and they could perceive that she listened to every passing step with anxious solicitude, hoping, no doubt, it might be Guy's.

And he came at last, bounding along the garden in the highest possible spirits, and shouting out, as he threw open the door,

'Mother! mother, where are you?' But in a moment every spark of gaiety was extinguished as he saw the sad group from amidst which his mother, the central figure, looking so wan and ill, held out her hand with a soft tearful smile, as much as to say—

‘Come to me, I cannot talk.’

And then Guy heard all about the bad dreams of the night, and how his mother had walked in her sleep, and been so frightened when she waked that she had dropped down like one dead, for such was Susanna’s brief summary of all that we have previously described. But neither Guy nor Phœbe was in reality listening to Susanna; he was leaning against his mother breast, his head lying on her shoulder, her arm fondly entwined round his body, while she whispered in answer to his troubled look and occasionally inquisitive eye, and to the slow, single tear that she saw gathering there,

‘Don’t mind, darling; I shall be better soon.’

But Phœbe was more deeply injured than she was aware of. When, a little later, she tried to stand up and to walk she was obliged to fall wearily back again and murmur,

‘I think I’ll go to bed. But I shall be better soon.’

And they got her to bed. And they sent Guy for the doctor, who could not get rid of the little fellow by any promises; no, he ‘must come back

if he pleased, with him.' And the doctor, struck by the boy's earnestness, went with him, hearing on the road from Guy all that the latter could tell him about his mother's illness. He grew grave when he heard of the sleep-walking, and said nothing more to Guy.

But after he had seen Phœbe, felt her pulse, and heard what she and the others had to say, he managed, on one pretence and another, to get everybody out of the room except himself and the ailing woman, and then he said to her, as he sat down in the chair by her side and took her hand,

'Excuse my speaking to you a little plainly. It's my duty, and it's to do you good. You have some secret mental trouble—is it not so?'

Phœbe shook her head, but her lips quivered and her face grew visibly whiter.

'Well, you know best, only let me say a few words. If this kind of thing—this sleep-walking—is not stopped at once it is impossible to say into what trouble it may not lead you and yours. Take my advice, confide the matter, whatever it may be, to your friends; talk it over with them, and you'll

soon get out of this morbid state. I can help you, by my professional advice, if you only determine to help yourself at the same time. Doctor and patient, my good woman, must co-operate, or no good will be done. There, now, keep yourself quiet; I shall send you some simple medicines, and when you've taken them I'll see how you get on. Good-morning; don't stir; I can find my way out, I hope, without your help. When I come to-morrow just you say to me, "Doctor, I've done as you bade me," and then I shall know you'll soon be all right again. It's your mind that's out of order rather than your body. Good-by!

And, so saying, the doctor took his leave, having added only a new pang to the many sorrows that afflicted Phœbe. 'Who was she to confide such a secret to?' she asked herself bitterly. To the squire? who, if he believed her, would send her, if he could, next day to gaol. To Stephen? whose brain would become more hopelessly muddled than ever by the knowledge of so perilous a matter. To Susanna? who would wish personally to profit by the disclosure; and who, in any case, could render

no material aid to a diseased mind like Phœbe's. Or to Guy? who, boy as he was, and loving, as he had always exhibited himself towards his supposed mother, was obviously incapable of bearing the responsibility of so tremendous a secret. Besides—and this was the eternal stumbling-block—what confession (which even to seem to be true must involve penitence) was possible without restitution? The boy had entwined himself round her very heart-strings, and was she now to lose him—and for what? to be herself treated probably as a felon, certainly as an infamous woman, who might be left slowly to die amid the execrations of the world, unless her misery impelled her to find a quicker end.

But not the less did the doctor's talk lead Phœbe to wish it were possible that she might find some one to whom she could disburden herself. If Susanna were older, and either married or engaged to some respectable man of her own rank in life, then, indeed, Phœbe might consider seriously the question of taking her into her counsel; but at present, for every reason, such a course was impracticable. And then Phœbe's thoughts once more wandered back to

the old and perpetually-recurring question—‘Did Susanna know anything after all? Was she conscious of any of Phœbe’s proceedings during this last eventful night?’

We might answer the question by a variety of suggestions and speculations, all based upon the idea of letting the reader judge for himself, and probably leaving him, as it is the habit of novelists to do, quite undecided after all. We will not (on the present occasion at least) avail ourselves of this ingenious device of fictionists; we will, on the contrary, like straightforward and veracious chroniclers, proceed now to show just what Susanna was doing and thinking on that same remarkable night.

From the moment of Phœbe’s going away to the Hall with the boy, Susanna had found it impossible to keep her thoughts from the workshop and its attractive secret—a secret which it guarded so jealously from her longing eyes. Again and again she dallied with the idea of venturing to it once more, if Stephen should take an after-dinner nap, as he often did, now that he was out of work and out of heart. But the previous beating had terribly

shaken Susanna's not very courageous spirit; and she felt sure the punishment then received was only the earnest of a far severer one in store if Phœbe again caught her similarly engaged. So she went on rummaging over her treasures, pretending, like a child at play, to find for the first time some very choice valuable, although knowing well enough she had found and gloated over it already. Then she selected things wherewith to decorate her chamber; but it was all in vain; these well-worn pleasures began to pall; it was the workshop alone she could feel interested in, and its possibly precious secret.

And when Stephen after dinner, instead of taking a nap or going himself to the workshop, suddenly announced his purpose to go to a man, some ten miles off, who he had heard wanted to put out a little job by contract that would occupy Stephen a good many weeks, it seemed to Susanna that she might never again have so good a chance as this—broad daylight, unrestricted intercourse with the workshop, no neighbours moving about, Phœbe and Stephen both far away. It quite excited her to think of it all. She could not, however, for a long time

make up her mind ; but at last she thought she would risk it, and venture again within the forbidden precinct.

But her search was as useless as before. And had she been far more patient and inventive, had she been capable of exhibiting a dogged industry in the search, instead of the fitful, and we might say, fretful examination that alone suited her, she would not easily have discovered the place or the thing she sought, since both were out of her reach. The bench was too heavy for her to move, and the movable block of wood not high enough. She was conscious of this difficulty, and tried to overcome it by pushing at each of the bricks regularly round, tier by tier, with the rounded end of the same long tool that Phœbe had used. But though no longer a child in mind, she had not yet got to a woman's strength of purpose or will. She was soon fatigued, and gave over (a second time) the unprofitable task. So, after an hour or more had been expended in a desultory kind of examination, interrupted by many a pause and cry of vexation, as she looked round and wondered where Phœbe could have found her hiding-

place, she took her way back to the house, glad to perceive that no one had come across her, so as to be able to speak subsequently of her whereabouts.

When she got into her bedroom she laid down, fairly wearied with her efforts, and at once angry and depressed by her failure, which seemed final. She fell asleep, and did not wake again for several hours. She then heard Stephen moving about below. He had just come home, and was lighting a bit of fire. Presently she heard Phœbe also enter, and she rapidly washed her face, and tidied her hair, and went down to carry out, in capital spirits, a new idea that had crossed her mind during the last few minutes. It had occurred to her that Phœbe must go now and then to the place where she had deposited her secret hoard (whatever that might consist of). Yes, she thought, she must go to it, if it were only to be quite sure it had not been meddled with. Could not Susanna then learn what she wanted by secretly dogging Phœbe's footsteps, and so getting to see what it was that Phœbe did in the workshop? The girl was delighted at the thought, and it was the hope of success from it that had made her so

very amiable to Phœbe on her return from the Hall as to offer her the loan of the guinea, and to bring out for Phœbe's use her mother's costly gunpowder.

‘How do I know,’ thought Susanna, ‘but that she may be going to the workshop this very night? It's very likely, after she's been to the Hall on such mysterious business that she wouldn't tell me anything about it.’

So, after Stephen had gone to bed, excessively fatigued and sleepy, Susanna began to yawn, and say she thought she would go too. With a loving kiss, and a ‘Good-night!’ she went.

But not to sleep. She had slept; and she was delighted now to find that she could watch, if necessary, for some hours; so, while she undressed, and moved about, and made the usual noises (as well, at least, as she could think of them), she quietly arranged that she would be ready either for bed, if it was necessary for her to get suddenly into it, or to follow Phœbe to the workshop, if, as she divined, the latter would have, or would make, occasion to go there to-night, either in connection with her business at the Hall, or to satisfy herself about

Susanna's possible proceedings while she had been away.

So, having prepared for bed, even to the putting on of her nightgown, she placed ready at her hand a large, thick, winter cloak, that could be put on or thrown off in an instant. She then undid and slightly opened the door, which, on coming upstairs, she had rather noisily shut and fastened; and then lay down, not to sleep or to rest, but only that it might be seen, if necessary, that she had gone to bed at the usual time. And there she stopped, listening for a long period to Phœbe's every movement. Once or twice, after a considerable pause, Susanna heard her sigh heavily, and then she hoped that something was going to be done to which that sigh was the prelude. But, after a little more delay, she heard Phœbe go to the street door and fasten it carefully, though Susanna was cunning enough to doubt whether all she heard was not mere pretence, and that the door might really be open at that very moment. Susanna, could not help laughing at the thought, and saying to herself,

'That wouldn't have imposed on my clever

mother, nor will it trick me. I wouldn't be surprised to hear her in a minute slipping out into the garden; but I am ready for her.'

But instead of this Phœbe came up to bed, slowly and wearily; and again Susanna heard her sigh deeply as she went into her own room. And here it is noticeable how cunning may occasionally obtain the end that is denied to real intellectual skill. A wiser listener in Susanna's position would have felt sure, from the very tone of that sigh—the inexpressible sadness of spirit conveyed by it—that Phœbe was in no mood for adventurous action of any kind; that she would never think of going to the workshop that night, however strong her tendency might be to go thither under ordinary temptation or fear. But cunning people get so charmed by their own little bits of ingenuity that they cannot readily resign themselves to the belief that their plans are unnecessary or mischievous. So was it with Susanna tonight. She had persuaded herself Phœbe would want to go to the workshop; and everything that Phœbe did which seemed to take her from the workshop appeared only to Susanna proof of the artful-

ness that was thought necessary to cover the intended visit. She was wrong in theory, but happened to prove wonderfully right, for once, in practice.

Although two or three hours passed by before anything happened of importance, Susanna was kept wakeful and watchful by the frequent sounds she heard coming from Phœbe's bedroom. She could not at all make them out. At times she thought she heard moaning, then a cry, then she was sure she heard Stephen and Phœbe engaged in talk. All this only confirmed the girl in her belief that something was going on which it behoved her to watch. She began to fancy that Stephen, innocent as he looked and talked, might perhaps know all that she supposed Phœbe to know; and that they were now discussing what had happened at the Hall, which must certainly have been about Guy. Then there was a long pause; and, just when Susanna began to find her eyelids drooping, and her hope die out, she was roused into sudden activity by the sound of a stealthy step on the stairs, going down. In an instant Susanna crept from the bed, put on her

slippers and her cloak, and went to the door to listen. Phœbe had already got to the front door, and was undoing the fastenings. Susanna stole down after her, and tried to prevent a particular and much-dreaded stair from creaking, but her blood ran cold as she heard the usual betraying noise. It was curious that Phœbe had passed the same stair in perfect silence. Susanna listened with all her soul to make sure whether or no she had been heard, but the process of drawing back the bolt of the door, and of unlocking it went on, so Susanna slid down into the darkness at the bottom and waited, holding her very breath, till she felt suffocated lest her neighbour in the darkness might hear her.

Phœbe got the door open at last, and Susanna could not but wonder at the noiselessness with which the whole had been done. Now a new fright seized her. When the door was opened there would be some light—not much, perhaps, for it was not yet dawn, but possibly sufficient to enable Phœbe to see Susanna where she lay crouched in the corner. But she was afraid of making matters worse by endea-

vouring to move to get behind some screen, so remained where she was.

Phœbe did not look back, but passed out with a strangely abstract and mysterious manner that Susanna noticed and was puzzled by.

As soon as the latter thought Phœbe had got far enough in advance she ventured to the door and crossed the threshold ; when, to her horror, she met Phœbe's shadowy form returning straight to the doorway. She gave herself up for lost. Retreat or advance was alike useless. She could only falteringly ask herself what Phœbe would do to her.

But, wonderful to say, Phœbe took no notice, did not even seem to see her, and she moved on past Susanna (who shrank from her as from a ghost) and drew the door to, which she seemed to remember she had left unclosed. She then, with that same heavy sigh that Susanna had heard so often during the night, passed on through the gloom towards the workshop.

Young as she was and inexperienced in life and its phenomena, Susanna knew now that Phœbe must be sleep-walking ; and though the girl felt her flesh

creep and her soul quake with supernatural fear, yet she also felt herself drawn on as by a kind of irresistible fascination to watch Phœbe's proceedings, not so much for the reason that had all along moved her as because of the strange, unearthly influence that seemed to have taken possession of her whole being.

When Phœbe reached the shed she stopped for a moment as if listening intently; and then, as if feeling unsatisfied, drew a little aside and bent low to the ground, just as she had once done in the workshop when first she concealed the packet there.

Satisfied at last, she went in, and now Susanna's long-cherished desire to be admitted to the secret of the workshop was gratified; in part, at least. She saw Phœbe move that ponderous bench bit by bit, going alternately from end to end: she saw her mount it when she had got it nearer to the wall; she saw her force out with a tool one of the bricks, and then she saw brought forth the packet—the packet that, as Susanna rightly thought, explained Guy's true birth.

Phœbe reclosed the aperture when she had ab-

stracted the package, and she did this with so much precision that Susanna felt she should have some difficulty to distinguish the spot in the daylight. The bench was also restored to its place. While Phœbe did all this she preserved the same mysterious and almost appalling air of quietude, broken, however, occasionally by the old low, deep, and pathetic sigh, that seemed to speak of a breaking heart.

Susanna waited but for one thing more—that was, to see Phœbe put the package into her bosom; and then she hurried back to the house as fast as her trembling limbs would carry her, certain beyond all question that her mother had been right; and that she, Susanna, now knew enough to enable her in all probability to become mistress of the rest. But she was also conscious of a new danger—namely, that Phœbe, whose wanderings of mind it was impossible to guess at, might come to Susanna's room before she could get back to it, if she allowed her to be the first to leave the workshop.

She had scarcely recrossed the threshold, got inside, and closed the door, before she heard Phœbe's

hand on the latch. Again she flew up the stairs, fearing for a moment she was pursued, but stopped panting to listen as she got to her own room. Phœbe was refastening the door ; and, having satisfied herself on that point, seemed to pause for an instant or two (no doubt while she took off her slippers and put them on the fireless fender to dry), and then she came up the stairs, and went into her own bedroom, to Susanna's great relief, who now herself got into bed ; and, after a few minutes of wonder, and ejaculation, and triumph, and suppressed terror, fell asleep ; and so was not aware of Phœbe's second visit to the workshop after she had waked from her dreamy and eventful midnight wanderings.

It will be understood now why it was that Susanna, notwithstanding her share in the doings of the night, was able to appear so naturally surprised when rudely awakened by Phœbe and challenged to give up what she had taken away. Susanna *was* as surprised as she seemed to be at such a charge. She had taken nothing, and was astounded that Mrs. Waterman should fancy she could have touched

the packet, if it was that she referred to. And, although for a moment the thought crossed her that Phœbe had somehow or other been conscious of her presence and oversight, she soon convinced herself that she was mistaken; and so, altogether, she was able to keep up that air of innocent astonishment which had gone far to convince Phœbe.

But when Phœbe, baffled in her purpose and hesitating as to Susanna's conduct, went away, Susanna got out of bed, full of wonder as to what had become of the package, and, on the whole, again inclined to think that Phœbe was playing a part; that she did know or guess that Susanna had watched her; and that all her subsequent proceedings had been suggested by the desire to get the package away from the workshop, and make Susanna believe it was lost in the strange adventures of the night. The latter, therefore, was more anxious than ever to watch Phœbe's movements at so critical a time, when the packet was evidently about to be consigned to a new place of concealment, more difficult, perhaps, for the secret-hunter to discover. And thus it was that at the very moment

before Phœbe returned to her room and found in her trunk what she had mislaid so strangely, Susanna had been also there, notwithstanding Stephen was in bed ; but of course she could see nothing of any consequence, and had to retreat hurriedly to evade the wakeful Phœbe.

Two very curious results followed from all this plotting and counter-plotting between them. Phœbe was utterly deceived as to the state of Susanna's knowledge, and yet she had left the packet in the very safest possible place, in restoring it to the workshop ; for Susanna believed that wherever else it might be, in the workshop it certainly was not. Had she not herself seen it taken away ? And did she not perceive, by Phœbe's manner at breakfast, that it was quite certain that if she had ever mislaid the packet at all, which Susanna doubted, she had soon found it again and hidden it in the new place ; for how else could she have become so suddenly listless as to action ?

‘No, no,’ thought Susanna. ‘She has done what she wanted to do—got it into a new hiding-place ; and she thinks that if I knew anything at all about

her proceedings to-night, she has baffled me by pretending it is lost.'

No wonder that Susanna began to weary of so much difficult cogitation. It made her fear that she would not be able to cope with Phœbe in such things. Then, again, she had a strong belief that she should never be able to hunt for the packet in safety in Phœbe's own bedchamber. All this puzzled her. Her thoughts began to revert to her mother. What would she have done or recommended? Why, she would probably have entirely changed her policy.

'What do I want to know more than I do know?' said Susanna to herself. 'My mother told me the story, and to-night Mrs. Waterman has given me the proof that it is true. Guy, then, is a gentleman born, and heir to the squire. But why did Mrs. Waterman deceive everybody so, I wonder?'

Susanna could not answer this question. She could not even frame to herself a probable theory. She only saw that the fact was so. She only wanted to know how she herself might profit by it.

'Yes,' said she to herself, after a long fit of

study, 'I know now what my mother would do. She would stick to Mrs. Waterman so closely, make her believe she loved her so very much, was such a very good and kind friend of hers, that she'd be sure at last to worm the truth out of her without seeming to want it, and so get to know all about everything. Yes, that's what she'd do. Well, can't I do it? Besides, if I don't do it this way, what good'll be all my cleverness? If I don't win Guy it's no use helping him to win back his property. And if I don't please Mrs. Waterman she'll turn Guy against me. I think she's doing it now. Envious, spiteful creature! She wants him to love nobody but herself. Oh, but I'll see! I'll make him like me. Can't I? Let me look at myself in the glass once more and see if I can't.'

Susanna went to her glass, sat down before it, tossed back her long fair hair with a playful, coquettish gesture, and laughed as she met her own reflection.

'I wonder if I shall get still more beautiful as I grow older. How I wish I wasn't so old. I'm almost thirteen, and he's only nine. People will set

him against me that way. But they shan't. Oh, I know!' Again she laughed at her image in the glass, which seemed to grow more radiant and lovely as it grew more full of good-humour.

'But he's an odd boy to deal with. I can't altogether make him out. He's so rude and short. And then he seems to see so much that you didn't expect. If I do make him care about me he'll watch me pretty close. But I don't care! I know what I know!'

For the third time the hopeful, and to some extent already triumphant Susanna laughingly sought her face in the glass, holding her head a little first to one side, then to the other, while she held her ringlets so as to envelope and give her features their most fascinating effect.

'Oh, I am very beautiful! and I mean to get more beautiful still. I must mind my temper. I believe it's true that people do get old-looking and ugly if they give way to their tempers. So I won't. And I mean to get hold of Master Guy. Won't it be nice to see him at my feet asking me to be his wife, and me blushing and refusing him, but so

gently that he'll be sure to ask me again ; and then again I'll refuse with a still deeper blush (somehow I *can* blush when I like if I'm at all excited), but then I'll look at him despairingly ; and he'll entreat me so frantically, and then I shall at the very last give way all at once, and drop on his neck, and tell him I can't tell him how much I love him ; and then I shall cry a good long while, and then, when it's all over, I shall be the lady of Branhape.

‘ Yes, and I will be a lady ! I'll show them I can spend money as well as a nobleman's daughter ; and I'll show them I can order my servants about and not be a bit afraid of them, however big-looking and consequential they are in their grand liveries, and with their big calves. Only let me see one of them but looking as if he was thinking—Oh, she's only Susan Beck's daughter !

‘ Well, I'm happy to-day ! I've done a good day's work ; so why shouldn't I be ? But now I must stop. I must be solemn, staid, and respectable. Yes, and I'll go to church regularly. And I'll try to please the people that are always talking bad about me. And I'll never let anyone see a bit of

temper any more. No, no; I mean to be the lady of Branhape—and that's the way.

‘There, now you know! I tell you so!’ and Susanna shook her head with all its waving ringlets at the face in the glass, which replied to her in the same mode. ‘But mind, it's a secret between us two. Mind you deny it, as I shall, in every possible way, if ever I'm obliged to speak before the right time. Oh, yes; I shall never win either Guy or Mrs. Waterman if I don't begin by appearing to forget all about myself. That used to be my fault. My clever mother told me so. But I'll be on my guard now. Oh yes, I see it all now. By the time he is seventeen, or, say eighteen, he shall be my husband; and then, a little while after, some accident must bring out the truth that we are the lord and lady of Branhape; and I must be wonderfully surprised; and then he will introduce me to all his kindred. Oh yes; I see them all waiting in the grand saloon; and Squire Guy—my own handsome and rich Squire Guy—will lead me up to them, walking very slowly and stately; and when I get to a certain distance I shall bend a little, proudly,

yet condescendingly—just like this.’ And, suiting the action to the word, Susanna began practising before the glass her curtsy to the future guests of Branhape.

END OF VOL. I.

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